



Imperialisms today

“We should recognize that there are other imperialisms”: A Marxist dissident explains what the left gets wrong about Russia

20 April 2015, by Charles Davis, Ilya Budraitskis

Russia is also not the Russia we read about in the West's corporate tabloids, its long-time leader, Vladimir Putin, cast as an irrational psychopath bent on eliminating all who oppose him, at home and in Eastern Europe and maybe even the United States too if he wakes up cranky. The truth, as is so rarely the case, lies somewhere in the middle: The truth is Russia is a nation-state and an imperial power that may not be any better than the United States, but also isn't really any worse. When it comes to being terrible, the competition is actually pretty close: The only country that [sells more arms](#) to repressive regimes than Russia is the United States of America, though the former has actually been [stealing some market share](#) by capitalizing on the instability caused by the latter (they also frequently arm the same people). When it comes to imprisoning the [highest percentage of its own population](#), the USA is still number one, but Russia is again number two.

The United States plays up its devotion to “liberty,” appealing to Russian liberals whose Skype conversations with Western NGOs are recorded by the NSA, while Russia appeals to Western leftists (and Eastern Ukrainians) by capitalizing on nostalgia for the Soviet Union and the

idea, more propagandistic than realistic, that state capitalism is markedly superior to the liberal variety. Too often, however, this is what defines the debate: each state's propaganda machine, with patriots believing their own country's talking points and dissidents believing the other's, obscuring what out to be the glaringly obvious fact that neither nation-state is motivated by any principle in domestic or global affairs more honorable than “what's good for our oligarchs,” who even live in the [same parts](#) of Manhattan.

If there is to be a new Cold War, the left should reject the temptation of reducing evil in the world to the actions of one's own government and recognize that imperialism, like capitalism, is a global phenomenon for which one can blame more than one villain. Are there differences between the powers? Sure, just as there are differences between Republicans and Democrats – and they are significantly less profound than the partisans of either faction would have us believe, having more to do with who has power than what one does with it. Russia sending billions of dollars worth of weapons to the Assad regime in Syria, for instance, is no less evil, nor fundamentally different, than the

United States arming the brutal regimes of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. We on the left can explain why imperialists do what they do and how it's not irrational but makes total sense according to the logic of capitalist nation-states, but we shouldn't confuse an explanation with justification or accept that logic as our own. We should focus on the crimes of the empire we know best, perhaps, but we shouldn't just dismiss the crimes of others or else we'll find we lost our moral credibility and swapped mindless patriotism for useful idiocy. The left is at its best when it doesn't allow skepticism and solidarity to stop at a national border – and just applying a cookie-cutter analysis to events abroad, it actually communicates with its comrades in other countries.

Ilya Budraitskis is an activist, writer and student at the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow who edits the socialist website, [OpenLeft.ru](#), and serves as a spokesperson for the Russian Socialist Movement, which he described to me as a “Marxist, anti-establishment organization.” Founded in 2011, when Russia saw massive street protests over allegations of vote-rigging by the government – the [largest demonstrations](#) since the

collapse of the Soviet Union – the group is deeply critical of both Putin and his liberal opposition, demanding the nationalization of major industry and worker control over the workplace while warning that anyone expecting serious change to come from establishment politicians through a corrupt electoral process is going to be sorely disappointed. “Now the streets must become the arena of political struggle,” the group said in a [2011 appeal](#), arguing that if the left wants to change Russia it must not sit back in the name of unity or pragmatism and cede the political arena to “the rich bastards who have commissioned the hideous farce known as Russian politics!”

I spoke with Ilya about the opposition to Putin – who’s leading it, as well as who’s going to these demonstrations and why – the effect the conflict in Ukraine has had on Russia’s political culture, who killed Boris Nemstov, and whether Russian imperialism is a necessary evil in a world that could use a check on the ambitions of the American empire.

Obviously the biggest story in Russia and here in the United State is the recent assassination of Boris Nemstov. Here in the West, Russia right now is portrayed as sort of a police state – people are afraid to express dissent. Is there any truth to that? Can you describe what the climate is like in the wake of this assassination? Is there fear among the opposition or is that overstated in the corporate media?

I will say that the fear in the opposition came much earlier. It came after we faced repression after the rise of the protest movement in 2011-2012. Maybe you hear about this [6th of May affair](#)– it was a huge police provocation at the anti-Putin demonstration in 2012, just the day before his inauguration as president. So you can say this atmosphere of fear and the atmosphere of repression towards the opposition they were growing during these years. Of course, last year was very difficult and very crucial in this sense because it was the year when the war with Ukraine was started and the confrontation that had existed before in this society

became much more harder.

You can say that from the beginning of last year the main fear in the internal politics for power, for the government, became the shadow of Maidan [Square, the Kiev center where protesters helped topple the Russian-backed Ukrainian government]; that something that happened in Ukraine could also be possible in Russia. So even if there is no real reasons exactly for the moment to have something... in Russia this shadow of Maidan became a paranoid idea for the government and also it became a very good instrument for criminalization of any kind of protest. So even now if you have some local protest or some strike or some kind of action which is not exactly political – it can be immediately identified as a kind of Maidan attempt.

So there is an atmosphere of paranoia which is very much distributed and of course which is very much in the interest of not only the president, but every local power on any level. So during all this era, from the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict, [we have been subjected to] extreme media propaganda. This propaganda was very much focused on the idea of the internal enemy: that we have this “fifth column.” And even the term, fifth column, came from a Vladimir Putin speech a year ago, a [very famous speech](#), when he announced the annexation of Crimea, and he also [claimed] that we have a group of national traitors inside the country and we have a fifth column. So if you look at Boris Nemstov, he was one of the figures who were presented as this fifth column during the last year mostly. So you can see the logic that stands behind this murder.

I do not totally agree with people who blame Putin for this murder. I’m not sure he has an interest in it. I will say that he probably has no interest in this kind of murder. When it happened it was clear that the media or government, they were very much confused.

So you don’t think Putin would have ordered this himself because, obviously, this politician wasn’t really a threat to his power. But would you agree with the

argument that this atmosphere, this talk of “fifth columns” and “traitors,” contributed to this murder? Or is this too much speculation at this point?

It was not in the clear interest of Putin because the picture of Russian life and Russian politics that he wants to create and his media wants to create is a picture of national unity and stability. And his fight against a possible Russian Maidan is a fight in the name of stability. When you have this kind of murder very openly, just a few hundred meters from the Kremlin, it totally contradicts the idea of stability. It’s a break with stability. And this break comes not from the opposition, but it seems like from their opposite – from people who call themselves “specialists.” It’s quite clear that those who tried to destabilize the internal situation, they’re not part of the opposition, but they’re like enemies of the opposition. And that completely destroys this propaganda [that it’s the opposition destabilizing the country].

Second thing, of course it’s an open challenge to the Russian police and security service, because it clearly shows that they don’t control the situation; they even don’t control the most central, important part of the city and they’re also probably not interested in this kind of events for even the bureaucratic reaction [i.e., taking the blame for letting it happen].

The third thing is that all these . . . these organizers of the anti-Maidan movement [in Russia], all these “patriotic groups’ around the government, who are probably feted by the government, they are now very much discredited because what kind of reaction [their rhetoric] now should produce.

All the levels of this official Putin political machine, you have problems with this murder. To say that he wants to frighten opposition, well it’s real effect was the opposite: Because the demonstration which [followed], my impression was that it was one of the most massive demonstrations that you have in the last year and it was clear that this murder touched a lot of people who before were not politically active. You had a lot of very new

people at this demonstration.

What kind of people are showing up to these demonstrations? And how would you describe the opposition in Russia? Is it mostly neoliberals like Nemstov or is it more diverse than that?

I can't say that it's just middle class because you have a lot of middle class who are totally loyal and you have a lot of people who do not belong to belong to the middle class who are on the side of the opposition. But it's mostly cultural, educational markers – you can say that it's some people who connect with the Soviet intelligentsia tradition. Maybe some of them are teachers or professors, some of them are small businessmen, but they have the same background, the same more or less level of education, and the same tradition of disagreement. And disagreement, more ethical than political disagreement. So these people, of course they're very politicized, but at the same time their level of political consciousness is [rather] primitive.

I mean that, for example, with the poor, they don't analyze their exact social interest or they don't connect their social interest with their political expression. So that's why for them, people like Nemstov, who as you said was openly neoliberal, as are a lot of people in the top of this opposition, who – despite the very just critiques of Vladimir Putin's politics in Ukraine or lack of freedom of speech – openly say that hospitals should be privatized, that we should be more aggressive in austerity in Russia, and should privatize the state property and things like this. Their position is somehow not so much discussed among their supporters, because for them it's something secondary, something not in their core of their nature of support, because the most important thing with them is ethical support – they see these people as the good people, the educated people, the people who talk to them using their language, but not people who have some exact social and economic program which confronts their own interest.

Right, so they're motivated more by issues like freedom of speech than free markets – that's the

position of the elites, but not what gets these people out to demonstrations.

Yes, you can say that.

What do they not like about the Putin government? Is it a sense that there's a crackdown on civil liberties? The state of the Russian economy, which makes people unhappy with the leader?

Right now the main issue for people is they feel [there are] so much lies from the government. They are so angry about the propaganda over what has happened in Ukraine. Because what you have now in Russian media, it's unbelievable. It's never ever happened, even in Soviet times, I mean this level of aggression and in a very crazy kind of style. If you even look at the Russian TV you understand that the third world war has already started and you are a soldier in this war. And what has happened in Ukraine is already a third world war war against, I don't know, Barack Obama . . . on one side acting against Russia. And so I think that it's mostly a reaction to these lies, but not a reaction to some real, economic or social problems that we now face in Russia. But those problems, they are really serious and they touch a much broader part of the population than this strata that are politically active and visit these kind of demonstrations.

The main question for this opposition is if they are satisfied with this ethical position and in fact isolation from the majority of the population . . . or if they want somehow to break with these constructions, and if they want to break they should also change their social agenda, radically change it, because right now you have an ongoing economic crisis in Russia, you have huge inflation, and you have the very clear answer of the government and this answer is extremely anti-social, it is extremely neoliberal. Putin's answer is the increase of the pension age, a lack of indexation [increasing pension payments to match price increases] in a situation where inflation is going on – in reality, 15 percent or even more – and you have no opportunities for people who are losing their workplaces

They're [the opposition] not able to attract a real big number of people from that part of society which is not already involved in the opposition. So I mean the situation is kind of a dead end. You have 50,000 or even more people in Moscow in commemoration of Boris Nemstov, this is the kind of force that is able to mobilize – this number of people again and again, but there is no chance to build a kind of more broad movement based on the interests of the majority.

Why do you think given Russia's history there isn't more of a class consciousness among the working class in Russia today?

Now you don't have the same working class as you did in the Soviet Union because of the total destruction of Soviet industry . . . and Boris Nemstov was a part of that process. And what was the real price of it? It was the lumpenization of a big part of the working class on one side, and on the other side it was the feeling of hopelessness on [the part of] working class people that any kind of collective struggle can work effectively. And you have very, very tiny independent unions in Russia and these independent unions, they became even weaker from the start of the economic crisis. And also, of course . . . their [the working class] main fear is still instability . . . and that's why they're still ready to basically support the current government who [they believe can] somehow prevent the situation which happened in the 90s.

Alexander Dugin has written that the annexation of Crimea marks "Russia's return to history." Do you think that "return to history" and this idea of restoring Russia's greatness on the world scene – that that's what's appealing to a lot of Russians? And that this current war climate is basically co-opting people who would otherwise be critics of Putin's economic policies?

Yes, of course. These kind of ideas always work, everywhere. If you make a promise to people to bring them back to history, whatever it means, it always works as rhetoric. But I think, for most people, for them it's unclear what is the real picture of the

situation in Ukraine. The majority still believe there is a just struggle between . . . our brothers and a fascist Ukrainian army.

You say a lot of people buy into the Russian government's propaganda on Ukraine. Here in the United States some parts of the left seem to have bought into this too. They think Maidan was basically a Nazi coup backed by Europe and the United States and they kind of ridicule the idea that Russia has inflamed the conflict by supporting the separatists in the East. Can you comment on that?

Of course, both the pictures of what is happening there are very simplified. So firstly, it's not true that it was a fascist coup in Ukraine because a "coup" is an action of a small, organized, armed group of people. [In Ukraine] the "coup" . . . had the clear support of hundreds of thousands of people. Even if you don't like it you should recognize that it was a real huge movement with the big support of the population of Ukraine. I have no sympathy with the Ukrainian government that you have now, but for me it's quite clear it can't be reduced just to a Western plot. There were some deep social contradictions in Ukrainian society that led to this moment.

Of course, in any situation like this you have the interests: American interests, European interests, Russian interests, and so on. But these interests can work effectively only if you already have some problems within the country. And that is true also for Crimea and the East of Ukraine; you also can't say that it's just the result of Russian military intervention. I knew very well even a few years ago what kind of feelings most people in Crimea had toward Russia. So for me it was clear that a total majority of them want to be part of Russia. It was clear for everyone 10 years ago, even 15 years ago, that you have some serious cultural split in Ukraine between the West and East.

And of course what happened after Maidan with this [language law](#) from the new government, it was a kind of provocation. But at the same time you can't imagine that this kind of terrible

military confrontation that you have in Eastern Ukraine was possible without Russian participation. For those on the American Left who believe that there is some "anti-fascist" partisans operating in the East of Ukraine, I really recommend reading some books about other guerrilla movements, like Che Guevara or whatever they like. It's the first [anti-fascist] partisan movement in the history, in Eastern Ukraine, which has more arms and more modern arms than the army who they confront.

Is it a common belief in Russia that these arms are coming from the Russian state?

There is a lot of evidence . . . that there are thousands of soldiers or weapons and so on sent to the East Ukraine. I think that the reason why it's still not recognized officially by the West, it's not because the West has no evidence, but because the West is trying to find a compromise. If they recognize it, if they say openly that Russia is in fact in a state of war in Ukraine, it means it will be much more difficult to somehow find a diplomatic solution. So I think that's the only explanation.

What do you think motivates the separatists in Ukraine? Is it just the language issue and identifying as Russian or is there something else? "Luhansk People's Republic" - "people's republic" sounds to my ears as if there's some socialist motivation. Is economics and socialism at all a part of this or is it all identity?

These slogans are not just socialist, but mostly Soviet slogans, which refer to a kind of Soviet nostalgia - and they mix openly with Russian chauvinism. A lot of people are fighting not for the Soviet Union, but for Russian empire, and deny even the existence of Ukraine as a nation. And these people are at the top of the movement. They act like the ideologists of this movement, like [Igor Strelkov](#), who was one of the first leaders of this kind of uprising in the East of Ukraine who was a Russian from Moscow who came there with clear identification, historical reference to the White Army during the Civil War, the White Army who fought against the Red Army and

who fought against the Ukrainian nationalists for the Great Russia. So I mean if you look at many, many [news] sources of the separatists, you find a lot of Russian chauvinist propaganda, the ideas of Russian empire and so on, which is very much mixed with Stalinism - but Stalinism mostly understood as the idea of the great state, but not as a kind of socialist order of things.

They're not motivated necessarily by a workers' state, but the idea of a strong, powerful state that the rest of the world respects.

And which can confront the West. And also another very important idea is anti-Semitism. For this movement in the East Ukraine, the idea that Maidan was a Jewish plot and all this kind of thing, they are very distributed. You can find it in thousands of publications. I don't want to say all people who participate in this movement are a bunch of anti-Semites, fascists and Stalinists, because on the side of Ukraine you also have open Nazis and anti-Semites as well as . . . just normal people who just want to save the independence of the country. And I also can understand their way of thinking, their feelings, and their fears - it's understandable. In Ukraine, you really have a lot of people for whom the question of the existence of Ukraine is very important. And they really feel that there is a fear for the independence of the country itself; it's not just the question of East Ukraine, but the right of the state to exist.

What do you think motivates the Russian government? Is Putin also interested in restoring this Russian empire? Because we also hear that Russia is afraid of NATO expansion and that NATO expansion is what is motivating it to take on a greater role in Ukraine. Is that just an excuse?

Of course one of the reasons for even the start of this conflict was that Russia was concerned about the expansion of NATO, which happened during the last decade. Also it was the question, you could say, of the "domestic" area of Russian imperialism, which is the post-Soviet space - the idea that the post-Soviet

space, maybe including the Baltic states, should be space where nothing can be decided politically without the participation of Russia. So you can't change the government without agreement from Russian society. That is something that led to the conflict with Georgia in 2008 and that is something that led to the conflict with Ukraine, because it's just simply a question of the master or owner of this space, who is the main person who should be asked about everything. Of course after what happened in Ukraine, for Putin it was another clear evidence that Russia somehow was out of the decision-making process. And I think there was also a third reason . . . the internal situation. What kind of political example could Maidan give to Russian society?

As in Putin was fearful of the same thing happening in Russia?

Yes. What has happened in Ukraine, there was a foreign policy element in it, but it was also a big challenge for the internal policy.

Russia in its English-language media, such as Russia Today, portrays Russia's actions as basically just a response to U.S. imperialism, as if Russia itself is not imperialist but rather an anti-imperialist power; supporting the Assad government in Syria, for instance. And that's portrayed as a check on U.S. hegemony. Do you share that view? Do you think, whatever your view of Putin domestically, that overall Russia does serve as a necessary check on the U.S.'s agenda or does it serve as a negative influence in the world?

Russian foreign policy is not a policy based on any kind of view of how the world should look. There's no kind of our own "Pax Americana" or something like this. In this sense, Russia is not the Soviet Union because the Soviet Union had a kind of project for the world; a clear alternative to the values and ideas [of the West]. There is nothing like this in Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign policy is a realistic policy. As Obama has pointed out a couple times, there are no

ideological problems with Russia. . . . Russia as a realist, cynical world force, wants to discuss its place in the world: the size of their piece of the cake. That's the explanation you always hear from Putin . . . that everyone has their interests in this world, everyone wants to benefit from everything, so we want to understand the rules of the game.

I mean, if the left are ready to support this kind of logic, even if this kind of logic in some ways confronts American imperialism, I probably don't agree with this left in a very fundamental way. I think that one of the main mistakes of a very big part of the left for years was the idea that imperialism can only be American; that if you talk about imperialism, we mean the United States, because there are not any other imperialist powers. But if we look back at the Marxist definition of imperialism we will find that imperialism, it's always a conflict. It's a conflict between states, between capitalist interests, and it always leads to a kind of military confrontation with the blocs of interests, like it was in the first world war. . . . So you should simply recognize that yes, even if we have no justification for American imperialism, we should recognize that there are other imperialisms. And you can't find among these imperialisms something that is more progressive or objectively progressive than the other. That should be a kind of rule, like in the conflicts you have in Ukraine: You have no good side; no progressive side. Of course, you have fascists on both sides. Of course, you have imperialist interests on both sides. And any kind of support of one or another side from the left simply strengthens one of the sides, but weakens the left.

I read your piece, "Intellectuals and 'The New Cold War,'" and you talk of the appeal of this kind of black-and-white worldview - of the "imposed choice between two camps," the West and Russia" - has to many intellectuals, not just in Russia but here in the United States. What do you think is the problem with that view and also

what do you think is so attractive about it?

It's attractive because it touches some structures of consciousness which were developed during the decades in the time of the Cold War, so it acts like a kind of reflex for many on the left to find some good, "progressive" side. And also of course it represents a lack of general picture of the world from the left. Even a hundred years ago one of the most important and strong points of the left was that they have the explanation of not just some basic laws of capitalism, but also the understanding of what is going on now in the world. They had a kind of complex picture of it. And now the left today they have no picture. They are very fragmented. They are very localized in their own countries, in their own situations. And it's kind of a paradox because the world became more global and the left became more provincial.

For the American left, of course for them only American imperialism exists, yes? I can't understand it. . . . In Russia, there are a lot of leftists who also believe that Russia is the main evil in the world, it's a reactionary empire, and it should be destroyed. Or, at the same time, you have a lot of leftists who believe somehow Russia is resisting American imperialism [and] who support these "republics" in the East of Ukraine.

But you have a huge provincialization of the left as a whole because they can't even understand each other and every leftist community, they believe in their own national reality. And that's why they can be so easily manipulated. By whom? By Russia Today? I think it's a very pitiable situation because the Russian propaganda machine, which is not the most clever, not so smart . . . it can so easily manipulate such a big sector of the Western left. It points to the problem of the Western left itself, but not the strength of Russia Today.

Salon

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Russian imperialism

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The first and most important characteristic of the Russian empire, says Nikolski, has always been "the maximization of territorial expansion for the realization of economic and political interests, as one of the most important principles of state policy" [1]. This expansion was the result of the permanent and overwhelming predominance of the extensive development of Russia over its intensive development: the predominance of the absolute exploitation of the direct producers over their relative exploitation, that is to say over one based on the increase in labour productivity.

"The Russian Empire was called "the prison of peoples". We know today that it was not only the state of the Romanovs which deserved this description", wrote Mikhail Pokrovsky, the greatest Bolshevik historian. He demonstrated that the Grand Duchy of Moscow (1263-1547) and the Tsardom of Russia (1547-1721) were already "prisons of peoples" and that these states were built on the corpses of the *inorodtsy*, the non-Russian indigenous peoples. "It is doubtful whether the fact that in the veins of the Great Russians there runs 80 per cent of their blood is a consolation for those who survived. Only the complete destruction of Great Russian oppression by this force which fought and is still fighting against all oppression, could be a form of compensation for all their sufferings" [2]. These words of Pokrovsky were published in 1933, just after his death and shortly before, at the request of Stalin, in the historic Bolshevik formula "Russia - prison of peoples", the first word was replaced by another one: Tsarism. Subsequently the Stalinist regime stigmatized the scientific work of Pokrovsky as "an anti-Marxist conception" of the history of Russia [3].

Military-feudal imperialism

Over the centuries, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the peoples who were conquered and annexed by Russia suffered three successive forms of Russian imperialist domination. "Military-feudal imperialism", thus named by Lenin, was the first. It is not uninteresting to discuss what mode of exploitation predominated in it: feudal or tributary, or again, as Yuri Semenov prefers, "politary" [4]. This debate is brought up to the present by the most recent research of Alexander Etkind. It flows from this that it was colonial modes of exploitation that were then dominant: "the Russian Empire was a great colonial system both at its distant frontiers and its dark heartlands", "a colonial empire alongside those of Britain or Austria, and a colonized territory like Congo or the West Indies". The key point is that "expanding into huge spaces, Russia colonized its own people. This was the process of internal colonization, the secondary colonization of one's own territory."

It is for this reason, says Etkind, that we need "an understanding of Russian imperialism as an internal, and not only external, affair" [5]. Serfdom - generalized by law in 1649 - had there a character that was just as colonial as black slavery in North America, but it concerned Great-Russian peasants as well as others, considered by Tsarism as "Russian": the "Little Russian" (Ukrainian) and Belarussian peasants. Etkind draws attention to the fact that even in Great Russia, peasant insurrections had an anti-colonial character, and that the wars by which the empire crushed these revolts were colonial. Paradoxically, the imperial centre of Russia was at the same time an internal colonial periphery, within which the exploitation and oppression

of the popular masses were more severe than in many conquered and annexed peripheries.

When "capitalist imperialism of the latest type" appeared, Lenin wrote that in the Tsarist empire it was "enmeshed, so to speak, in a particularly close network of pre-capitalist relations" - so close that "in general, military-feudal imperialism is predominant in Russia". Therefore, he wrote, "in Russia the monopoly of military power, immense territory, or special facilities for pillaging non-Russian indigenous peoples, China, etc., partly complements, partly substitutes the monopoly of modern, up-to-date finance capital" [6]. At the same time, as the least developed imperialism among the six major powers, it was only a sub-imperialism. As Trotsky noted, "Russia paid in this way for her right to be an ally of advanced countries, to import capital and pay interest on it - that is, essentially, for her right to be a privileged colony of her allies - but at the same time for her right to oppress and rob Turkey, Persia, Galicia, and in general the countries weaker and more backward than herself. The twofold imperialism of the Russian bourgeoisie had basically the character of an agency for other mightier world powers" [7].

No decolonization without separation

It was precisely the powerful extra-economic monopolies mentioned by Lenin that guaranteed the continuity of Russian imperialism after the overthrow of capitalism in Russia by the October Revolution. Contrary to previous statements by Lenin, that the norm of the socialist revolution would be the independence of the colonies, only the colonies that the expansion of the Russian Revolution had not reached, or which rejected it,

separated from Russia. In many peripheral regions, its expansion had the character of a "colonial revolution" led by Russian settlers and soldiers without the participation of the oppressed peoples, indeed even with the maintenance of the existing colonial relationships. Georgi Safarov described such an unfolding of the revolution in Turkestan [8]. Elsewhere, it had the character of military conquest, and some Bolsheviks (Mikhail Tukhachevsky) quickly concocted a militarist theory of the "revolution from without" [9].

The history of Soviet Russia has negated the opinion of the Bolsheviks, according to which with the overthrow of capitalism the relations of colonial domination of some peoples over others would disappear and that consequently these peoples could, or even should, remain within the framework of a single state. The "imperialist economism", denying the right of peoples to self-determination, which (criticized by Lenin) was spreading among the Russian Bolsheviks, was in an extreme manifestation of this. In reality, it is exactly the opposite: the state separation of an oppressed people is the precondition for the destruction of colonial relations, although it does not guarantee it. Vasyl Shakhrai, Bolshevik activist of the Ukrainian revolution, had already understood this in 1918 and he publicly polemicalised with Lenin on this question [10]. Many other non-Russian Communists understood it then, especially the leader of the Tatar revolution, Mirsaid Sultan Galiev. He was the first communist to be removed from public political life at the demand of Stalin, in 1923.

In reality, the imperialism based on extra-economic monopolies mentioned by Lenin reproduced itself in many ways, spontaneously and unnoticed, even when it lost its specifically capitalist base. It was for this reason, as Trotsky demonstrated, that in the 1920s Stalin "became the vector of the Great-Russian bureaucratic oppression" and quickly "secured advantages for Great-Russian bureaucratic imperialism" [11]. With the establishment of the Stalinist regime, there was the restoration of the imperialist domination of Russia

over all these peoples, previously conquered and colonized, who remained within the borders of the Soviet Union, where they made up half the population, as well as over the new protectorates: Mongolia and Tuva.

Rise of bureaucratic imperialism

This restoration was accompanied by murderous police violence and even genocide - the extermination by famine known in Ukraine as the *Holodomor* and in Kazakhstan as the *Zhasandy Asharshylyk* (1932-1933). The national Bolshevik cadres and the national intelligentsia were exterminated and intensive Russification was begun. Entire small peoples and national minorities were deported (the first big deportation in 1937 concerned Koreans living in the Soviet Far East). Internal colonialism spread once more and "the most terrible of these practices was the exploitation of prisoners of the Gulag, which can be described as an extreme form of internal colonization" [12]. In the same way as under Tsarism, the immigration of the Russian and Russian-speaking population towards the peripheries calmed the tensions and socio-economic crises in Russia, while ensuring Russification of the peripheral republics. Overpopulated, impoverished and starving after the forced collectivization, the Russian countryside massively exported the labour force to the new industrial centres on the periphery of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the authorities hindered the migration towards the towns of the local - non-Russian - population of the countryside.

The colonial division of labour distorted, indeed slowed down development, and sometimes even transformed the republics and peripheral regions into sources of raw materials and zones of monoculture. This was accompanied by a colonial division between the city and the countryside, manual and intellectual, skilled and unskilled, well or badly paid labour, as well as an equally

colonial stratification of the state bureaucracy, the working class and entire societies. These divisions and stratifications guaranteed to the ethnically Russian and Russified elements privileged social positions regarding access to income, skills, prestige and power in the peripheral republics. The recognition of ethnic or linguistic "Russianness" in the form of the "public and psychological wage" - a concept that David Roediger has taken from W.E.B. Du Bois and applied in his studies of the white American working class [13] - became an important means of Russian imperialist domination, and of the construction of an imperialist "Russianness" also inside the Soviet working class.

During World War II, the participation of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the struggle for a new division of the world was an extension of domestic imperialist policy. During the war and after its end, the Soviet Union recovered much of what Russia had lost after the revolution, and also conquered new territories. Its surface grew to over 1.2 million km², reaching 22.4 million km². After the war, the area of the USSR exceeded by 700,000 km² that of the Tsarist empire at the end of its existence, and was smaller by 1.3 million km² compared to the surface of this empire at the height of its expansion - in 1866, just after the conquest of Turkestan and shortly before the sale of Alaska.

Fighting for a new division of the world

In Europe, the Soviet Union incorporated the western regions of Belarus and Ukraine, Carpatho-Ukraine, Bessarabia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, parts of East Prussia and Finland, and in Asia Tuva and the southern Kuril islands. Its control was extended over the whole of Eastern Europe. The USSR postulated that Libya be placed under its tutelage. It tried to impose a protectorate over the big Chinese border provinces - Xinjiang and Manchuria. In addition, it wanted to annex northern Iran and

eastern Turkey, exploiting for that the desire for liberation and unification of many local peoples. According to the Azerbaijani historian Jamil Hasanli, it was in Asia and not in Europe that the "Cold War" began, yet in 1945 [14].

"The parasitic character of the bureaucracy manifests itself, as soon as political conditions permit it, through imperialist plundering", wrote at that time Jean van Heijenoort, former secretary of Trotsky and future historian of mathematical logic. "Does the appearance of elements of imperialism imply the revision of the theory that the USSR is a degenerated workers' state? Not necessarily. The Soviet bureaucracy feeds in general on an appropriation of the work of others, and we have already, long ago, recognized this fact as part and parcel of the degeneration of the workers' state. Bureaucratic imperialism is only a special form of this appropriation" [15].

The Yugoslav Communists became rather quickly convinced that Moscow "wanted to completely subordinate the economy of Yugoslavia and make of it a simple complement providing raw materials to the economy of the Soviet Union, which would hamper industrialization and disrupt the socialist development of the country" [16]. The Soviet-Yugoslav "joint-stock companies" were to monopolize the exploitation of the natural resources of Yugoslavia that Soviet industry needed. Unequal trade between the two countries would guarantee the Soviet economy super-profits at the expense of the Yugoslav economy.

After the break of Yugoslavia with Stalin, Josip Broz Tito said that from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939) and especially after the conference of the "Big Three" in Tehran (1943), the USSR took part in the imperialist division of the world and "is consciously pursuing the old Tsarist road of imperialist expansionism". He also said that the "theory of the leading people within a multinational state" proclaimed by Stalin "is nothing but the expression of the fact of the subjugation, the national oppression and the economic plunder of the other peoples and countries by the leading people" [17]. In 1958, Mao Zedong

ironically remarked in a discussion with Khrushchev: "There was a man by the name of Stalin, who took Port Arthur and turned Xinjiang and Manchuria into semi-colonies, and he also created four joint companies. These were all his good deeds" [18].

The Soviet Union on the brink of collapse

Russian bureaucratic imperialism was underpinned by powerful extra-economic monopolies, further strengthened by totalitarian power. But their character was only extra-economic. Because of this it proved too weak or completely incapable of carrying through the Stalinist plans of exploitation of the satellite countries in Eastern Europe and the border regions of People's China. In the face of the increasing resistance in these countries, the Kremlin bureaucracy had to abandon the "joint-stock companies", unequal trade and the colonial division of labour that it wanted to impose. After the loss of Yugoslavia, from 1948 on, it gradually lost political control over China and some other countries, and had also to weaken its control over others.

Even within the USSR the extra-economic monopolies proved incapable of securing the long-term imperialist domination of Russia over the principal peripheral republics. Industrialization, urbanization, the development of education and more generally the modernization of the peripheries of the Soviet Union, as well as the growing "nationalization" of their working class, of the intelligentsia and of the bureaucracy itself began to change gradually the balance of power between Russia and the peripheral republics in favour of the latter. Moscow's domination over them weakened. The growing crisis of the system accelerated this process, which began to tear the Soviet Union apart. The counter-measures of the central power - such as the overthrow of the regime of Petro Shelest in Ukraine (1972), considered as "nationalist" by the Kremlin - could not reverse this process, nor effectively stop it.

During the second half of the 1970s, the young Soviet sociologist Frants Sheregi tried to observe Soviet reality based on "Marx's theory of classes, combined with the theory of colonial systems". He concluded that "the gradual extension of the national intelligentsia and the bureaucracy (civil servants) of the non-Russian republics, the growth of the working class - in a word, the formation of a more progressive social structure - will lead the national republics to secede from the USSR". A few years later, at the request of the highest authorities of the Soviet Communist Party, he studied the social situation of the teams of young people mobilized by the Komsomol throughout the country to build the Baikal-Amur Mainline Railway. This was the famous "construction of the century".

"I became interested", says Sheregi, "in the contradiction that I discovered between the information about the international composition of the builders of the railway, forcefully diffused by official propaganda, and the high level of national uniformity of the construction brigades that arrived." They were almost entirely composed of ethnically and linguistically Russian elements. "I then came to the unexpected conclusion that the Russians (and the "Russophones") were being driven out of the national republics? - driven out by the so-called titular nationalities, for example by the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan.

This was confirmed by research that he conducted into two other major projects in Russia. "The central government knew it and participated in the resettlement of Russians by funding the "shock engineering projects". From this I concluded that since the social funds of the national republics had been depleted, there was a shortage of jobs, including for the representatives of the titular nationalities where social guarantees (crèches, holiday homes, sanatoriums, opportunities for housing) existed; such a situation can cause inter-ethnic antagonisms, so the authorities gradually "repatriated" Russian youth from the national republics. Then I realized that the Soviet Union was on the verge of breaking up" [19].

Military-colonial empire

The crisis of the Soviet bureaucratic regime and of Russian imperialism was so great that to everyone's surprise the USSR collapsed in 1991, not only without a world war, but even without a civil war. Russia lost its outer peripheries, because fourteen non-Russian republics of the Union left it and proclaimed independence - all those who, according to the Soviet Constitution, had this right. This meant a loss of territory, unprecedented in the history of Russia, of an area of 5.3 million km². But, as noted by Boris Rodoman, an eminent scientist who created the Russian school of theoretical geography, today too "Russia is a military-colonial empire, living at the price of an unbridled waste of biological and human resources, a country of extensive development, in which the extremely wasteful and costly use of land and nature is a common phenomenon". In this domain, as well as in regard to "the migration of populations, the mutual relations between ethnic groups, between the local population and migrants in various regions, between state authorities and the public, the "classic" characteristics of colonialism remain vivid, as in the past".

Russia has remained a plurinational state. It includes twenty one republics of non-Russian peoples, covering almost 30 per cent of its territory. Rodoman writes: "In our country we have an ethnic group bearing its name and providing the official language, as well as many other ethnic groups; some of them have national-territorial autonomy, but do not have the right to leave this pseudo-federation, in other words, they are forced to stay there. More and more often the necessity of the existence of distinct administrative units according to ethnic criteria is put in question; the process of their liquidation has already begun with the autonomous districts. Yet almost no non-Russian people has begun living in Russia as a result of migration; they were not resettled in an existing Russian state - on the contrary, they are peoples conquered by this state,

pushed back, partly exterminated, assimilated or deprived of their state. In such a historical context national autonomies, even regardless of to what extent they are real and to what extent only nominal, should be seen as a moral compensation for ethnic groups who have suffered the "trauma of subjugation". In our country the small peoples which do not have national autonomy, or which are deprived of it, disappear quickly (e.g. the Vepsians and the Shors). The indigenous ethnic groups, at the beginning of the Soviet period, constituted a majority in their autonomous units. They are now a minority because of colonization, linked to the appropriation of natural resources, public works, industrialization and militarization. The development of "waste lands", the construction of certain ports and nuclear power plants in the Baltic republics, etc., not only had economic reasons, but also were aimed at the Russification of the border regions of the Soviet Union. After its collapse, the military conflicts in the Caucasus, whose peoples are being held hostage to the imperial policy of "divide and rule", are typical wars to conserve the colonies in an empire that is disintegrating. The extension of its sphere of influence, including the integration of parts of the former Soviet Union, is now a priority of Russian foreign policy. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Tsarist Russia, nomadic tribes swore allegiance and their land automatically became Russian; post-Soviet Russia distributes Russian passports to people in countries on its borders..." [20].

Restoration of capitalist imperialism

The restoration of capitalism in Russia has partially complemented and partially substituted the extra-economic monopolies, weakened and truncated after the break-up of the Soviet Union, by a powerful monopoly of finance capital welded to the state apparatus. Russian imperialism, reconstructed on this basis, remains

an inextricably internal and external phenomenon, operating on both sides of the borders of Russia, which once more are beginning to be movable. The Russian authorities have built a state mega-corporation which has the monopoly of the internal colonization of Eastern Siberia and the Far East. These regions have oilfields and other great riches. They have privileged access to the new global markets in China and in the Western Hemisphere.

The two regions mentioned may share the fate of Western Siberia. "The federal centre keeps for itself almost all West Siberian oil revenues, not even giving Western Siberia money for the construction of normal roads", wrote the Russian journalist Artem Yefimov a few years ago. "The trouble, as usual, is not colonization, but colonialism", because "it is economic exploitation and not the improvement and development of the territory that is the aim of the corporation mentioned." "Basically it comes down to admitting that in the country, at the highest level of the state, colonialism reigns. The resemblance of this corporation to the East India Company and other European colonial companies of the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries is so obvious that it could be funny" [21].

A year ago, the massive uprising of Ukrainians on the Maidan in Kiev, crowned by the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime, was an attempt by Ukraine to finally break the colonial relationship historically binding it to Russia. We cannot understand the present crisis in Ukraine - the annexation of the Crimea, the separatist rebellion in the Donbass and the Russian aggression against Ukraine - if we do not understand that Russia is still and always an imperialist power.

Kowalewski is author of several works on the history of the Ukrainian national question, published among others by the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. We recommend his article "For the independence of Soviet Ukraine", International Marxist Review, Vol. 4, N° 2, Autumn 1989. The present article is taken from Le Monde Diplomatique - Edycja polska, N° 11 (105), November 2014.

Communal fascism and its dangers

4 November 2014, by Kunal Chattopadhyay

Friends, it is necessary to be passionate about the fact that Narendra Modi, leader of the BJP, is being projected as the next Prime Minister of India when we know the results of the General Election in the middle of May. But it is also necessary to reflect coolly about what it would mean and how to react..

We have to be careful in using the term fascism. It is often used indiscriminately. When the police beat up striking workers or agitating students, ultra left groups issue leaflets talking about "the barbaricÂ fascismÂ of the police". What is a bourgeois democratic baton charge, please? I remember when I was a student, graffiti on Calcutta walls could be seen condemning Jyoti Basu as a new Mussolini. And of course, we have the regular attacks on Indira Gandhi's "fascism".

Make no mistake, we have had despicable, very right wing, authoritarian governments. Like Indira Gandhi, especially during the emergency. But it was notÂ fascism. If we do not get this right, we will be crying wolf so often, that we will be diluting the gravity of the meaning ofÂ fascism, and making people feel, oh, thenÂ fascismÂ is not that bad. If the emergency wasÂ fascism, then you survive a degree of terror but then vote it out roundly. Keeping this in mind, we need to understand why it is the Sangh Parivar, including the BJP, that we call fascist, not others.

In doing this, we however have to note something else. Bourgeois liberal intellectuals are rapidly coming out and declaring that the Sangh is not that bad, or, if the Sangh is, Modi is not. There are many examples, but for lack of time I want to talk about just two of them. Both are well known, and have Wikipedia articles on them, which means they are not recognized only among intellectuals, but much more widely.

One is Ramchandra Guha. Guha is a smooth, supposedly Gandhian intellectual, who, as befits a modern time Gandhian, is quite anti communist. He is the one who attacked Arundhati Roy as "the Arun Shourie of the Left", alleging she was trying to take away credit from Medha Patkar.

Now that Medha Patkar is contesting as AAP candidate, where is Guha? He is telling his readers that Indian democracy is so strong that the coming to power of a Modi will not damage it. Even while democratic institutions are already reeling, and as I hope to show, despite the evidence that wherever the RSS enters it systematically attacks democratic institutions, our learned scholar tells us, institutions are so strong we do not have to take strongest measures to save it. Then he goes on to make lying comments, drawing a parallel between Chavez and Modi.

Another person is Rudrangshu Mukherjee. Wikipedia tells the world that he is a leftist historian who opposed the left after Singur-Nandigram. I remember him as turning bitter anti-communist the moment the crisis of the Stalinist system made it evident there would be no more grand patronage from left circles, writing worn out charges against Lenin even while recent research was proving them to be sheer falsifications. He has made his name as a thoroughgoing anti-communist for whom democracy and liberalism have to be defended from communists.

But he is very keen to teach us that there is no fascist threat. Modi? Oh, we have seen all that before, such as Indira Gandhi. So do not call Modi fascist - that is the message he dins out, as Opinion page Editor of The Telegraph, one of India's leading newspapers for the upper class. Why does this happen? Because the liberal is at bottom much closer to the

fascist than to the left. You may find this difficult to swallow. But liberalism bases itself on the free market. And therefore it finally opposes itself to any kind of communism, even if it pretends that it is doing so because of the crimes of Stalinism. The proximity of liberalism to fascism, and the suppleness of liberal intellectuals and their readiness to submit to fascists is being documented anew with these writers, and standing behind them, the institutions of Indian liberal civil society, the media, the academic institutions, and others. The bourgeois dynamics of risingÂ fascismÂ eventually forces liberals to accept it.

However, I want you to understand also thatÂ fascismÂ has an autonomous dynamics, and we would be wrong to reduceÂ fascismÂ to economic determinism. I. G. Farben may have delivered Zyklon-B as per contract and received payments from the state. But IG Farben did not dictate the Holocaust.

So in that case what isÂ fascismÂ and why do I say that the RSS/BJP is really fascist while others are not?

a) The rise ofÂ fascismÂ happens during periods of deep social crisis of capitalism in the age of imperialism. In the era of globalised markets and sharp competitions, when the "normal" processes of capital accumulation slow down, the structural crisis of capitalism demands a violent solution through shifting the balance of class forces in favour of monopoly capital, which is what the fascist seizure of power does.

b) Normally, bourgeois democracy is advantageous for capitalism, because it allows tension to be released through periodically voting out a government party, as well as in the form of periodic reforms. Also, in this system a wider part of the ruling class becomes co-sharers of power. But this is not true for periods of crisis, when

the bourgeoisie needs extreme surgery in its basic class interests.

c) This calls for acute centralization, which cannot be achieved through state power alone. Even military dictatorships do not always have the required effect, because the primary level class conflicts in the market economy would daily reproduce proletarian class consciousness and allow it to grow to higher levels. What monopoly capital needs is a force that can be mobilised against the working class, that will organise and fight against the forces of the working class, create regular terror, demoralise the class-conscious elements, and after the fascist seizure of power smash all organisations of the working class and atomise the unity of the class conscious proletarians. This calls for a counter-revolutionary mass movement.

d) The main constituents of such a force can only be the petty bourgeoisie. Deep economic crises create despondency and desperation within the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie. There are certain generally identifiable elements in the ideology of the petty bourgeois mass movement, including chauvinist nationalism, verbal hostility to capitalism, a deep and abiding hatred of the organised working class and the struggle for socialism, a sense of pain for a lost golden age, and a deep psychological malaise. This kind of a movement can only be built up if it begins as an independent one, not just an instrument of ruling class manipulation.

e) Fascism can succeed only if even before the seizure of power it can make the working class retreat considerably. The balance must tilt in favour of the fascists before their seizure of power. The installation of fascism in power is a way of declaring civil war. That is a dangerous gamble, and so the bourgeoisie would like to have some guarantee of the superior strength of the fascists. In the initial stages, only the most aggressive and marginal elements among the petty bourgeoisie join the fascist bands. The "respectable" petty bourgeoisie do so only when it is reasonably sure that it is jumping in the right direction.

f) When fascism smashes the organised proletariat with its hammer blows, it has rendered its services to the bourgeoisie. Thereafter, monopoly capital desires to bring it to heel. This involves a complex process, including the bureaucratisation of the leading layers of the fascist cadres, as well as the destruction of those layers who take too seriously the social rhetoric of the fascist movement. The fascist state also has international repercussions. The desire for change which pushes monopoly capital in the direction of an accommodation with the fascists involves an overcoming of economic downturns through a sharply inflationary policy. Military investments become an important part of the project of economic recovery as well as political strategy. So an aggressive foreign policy also develops.

Why do we call the Sangh, and Modi, fascist?

To start with, in its origin, the RSS consciously modeled itself after the fascists. The shakhas were modeled after Mussolini's Blackshirts. When the Nazis attacked Jews all over Germany on Kristallnacht, M. S. Golwalkar wrote approvingly in his *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, : "To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her (sic) purging the country of the Semitic Races" the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by."

In the same work, he explained the political conclusion that needed to be drawn: "The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the

Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment" not even citizen's rights. There is, at least, should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country."

The avowal of the Nazis as an ideal was further explained by Anthony Elenjittan, a Christian convert to the RSS outlook. "The RSS from the very inception of the movement hoisted Bhagva flag, Dharma Chakra and Satya MevaJayte as their symbols, and have grown around these patriotic ideals. Hence, the RSS youth, given more favourable circumstances can be in India what was Hitler youth in Germany, fascist youth in Italy. If discipline, organised centralism and organic collective consciousness means fascism, then the RSS is not ashamed to be called fascist. The silly idea that fascism and totalitarianism are evils and parliamentarism and Anglo-Indian types of democracy are holy, should be got rid of from our minds" (The Philosophy and Action of the RSS for the Hind Swaraj, p.197).

Though the RSS today pretends that the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha were totally distinct, in fact there was both considerable overlap between the two organizations, and a great degree of ideological overlap. The key Hindu Mahasabha ideologue, V. D. Savarkar, put forward many of the crucial aspects of present day RSS doctrine. It was Savarkar who first argued that territorial nationalism was a wrong concept. Those who did not have their *punyabhumi* at the same place as their *pitribhumi* could not be equal citizens. This ruled out Muslims and Christians. Golwalkar later added communists, asserting that they were all people having their *punyabhumi* in Russia. In place of territorial nationalism, Savarkar argued, what was needed was cultural nationalism, equating religion with culture. Likewise, it was Savarkar who advocated flatly the need to push Muslims into second-class citizen status. It was Savarkar who created the basic ingredients of

the picture of the Muslim as the eternal enemy who must be fought by a so-called Hindu awakening. And it was Savarkar, again, who made raping Muslim women sound like a holy task for Hindus (read his *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*).

However, it is not this alone that makes them fascist. We could then have simply equated them with the Taliban or with Ayatollah Khomeini. This is where I would disagree with people who would be willing to extend the term fascist to most Islamic fundamentalist movements and regimes.

It is the specific relationship that the Sangh combine aspires to develop in relation to the Indian bourgeoisie that must be kept in mind. The RSS on one hand aims to clearly keep its agenda intact, and it has shown itself willing to let go of temporary advantages like ruling through coalition governments. But at the same time, the RSS has a definite class agenda in its own way. Right from the 1930s, Moonje made it clear that for the forces of the Hindutva right, communism and socialism were fundamental enemies. M.S. Golwalkar for his part explained this equally bluntly. In the aftermath of Gandhi's murder, when the RSS was banned, Golwalkar's exchanges with Patel show him offering a pact to Patel, on the basis of a shared hostility to communism.

And when Golwalkar and his followers talk of communism, we need to understand it very ecumenically. Just as when Hitler ranted against Marxism, he made no distinction between Social Democrat, Communist, dissident Communist, or just trade unionist with a degree of proletarian class-consciousness, the same is true of the RSS.

From the faintest pink to the most ultra-red, all come under its scanner. The RSS-BJP bloc is willing to fight in its own way against the working class. It is willing to smash every form of independent proletarian organisation. In his 'Introduction' to *Golwalkar's Bunch of Thoughts*, Prof. M.A. Venkat Rao writes: "Another advantage of the Indian [read RSS] view of society is that it eschews class war. It postulates social harmony as a

potentiality, if not as a fully actual order of laws and customs, observances and enforcements. The state is not a class agent of the upper class. Not is it an exploiting agency. It is an agent of morality or dharma". (pp. xxxii - xxxiii).

So first, a violently aggressive model of Hindu nationalism lies at the root of RSS ideology. Second, it had in the past openly proclaimed itself fascist. Because it was forced to operate within a bourgeois democratic set up for decades, it concealed the past utterances, but it has NEVER repudiated them.

Third, there has been a fundamental difference between the role of the Jan Sangh in the past and the rise of the BJP in the last three decades, and particularly the anointing of Modi this time round.

The RSS had been seeking to promote its agenda, by whatever means, all these years. But by and large, the Indian capitalist class had preferred the Congress, its historic party. This is what has changed. So why does the ruling class prefer the fascist alternative, and why does it think *fascism* will be useful?

The Gujarat Model:

First, we need to look at how Modi has consolidated, how BJP and the Sangh have consolidated in Gujarat.

There are several dimensions to the Gujarat Model, and they all tie in. It is not that there was a so called aberration of 2002, and there is a since then one decade long story of growth in Gujarat. The Pogrom of 2002 was not an accident, not an aberration, and not a reaction to what happened at Godhra. At that time we put out and helped to put out many books, and I would suggest you look at some of them. I edited *The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism*, and Inquilabi Communist Sangathan published it from Vadodara itself. Maitreyee Chattopadhyay and Soma Marik edited a Bengali volume, *Garbhaghathi Gujarat*, containing translations of a number of reports on the gendered

nature of communal fascist politics, something about which I will not have time to speak, but which needs discussion. Soma Marik, Tanika Sarkar, and others have written on that subject.

The pogrom was built on years of preparation. Hindus had had hatred preached to them by the RSS.

The BJP, once it came to power in Gujarat, wasted no time before declaring that its police would monitor all cases of Hindu-Muslim marriages, because it suspected that these were conspiracies. The post-Godhra pogroms showed sustained preparation. Electoral rolls were used to find out Muslims. Municipal records were used to identify shops and establishments owned by Muslims. Lies were peddled by Gujarati newspapers, to the effect that women had been taken away from the train and raped inside a Madrasa.

Then the pogrom was fanned, and allowed to check unchecked. As the Ehsan Zafri case and the Best Bakery Case both show, the police did nothing, and even encouraged. All this was done to consolidate a strong Hindutva sentiment.

And as there is a myth, a lie being peddled, that no communal violence has happened in Gujarat since 2002, let me make two quick points. First, there was a serious issue in Vadodara in 2006 – just one example out of several. The reason Modi was forced to act, to even accept the army, was because, this time he did not have Advani as Union Home Minister covering his rear. Second, so called Islamic terrorism and fake encounter deaths now took over. And they also helped in building the fake 56 inch image. We are fortunate to have with us today a member of the Jamia Teachers Association. They played an important role in fighting Modi over the fake encounter deaths in Gujarat. Ishrat Jahan, Sohrabuddin, Tulsi Prajapati, these are all supposedly people who were terrorists trying to kill Modi because he is the soul of India's Hindus. They were all murdered. And now, investigations have put many of the leading police personnel, the killers, behind bars. They have shown that these were

innocent people murdered so that an anti-Muslim rage could be whipped up.

So the communal politics, including the frenzy, has been an integral part of the Sangh strategy, of Modi's strategy. Now we need to relate it to "development", Gujarat style.

Certainly, as I said, there is a difference between Modi's bid for power this time, and the previous efforts. Modi was anointed by the big honchos of Indian capitalism at the Vibrant Gujarat programme. This makes his bid different from the Vajpayee-Advani efforts of earlier years. This also shows why Modi had the clout to brush aside - more accurately, kick aside - everyone in the BJP challenging his absolute power.

What has happened, is that the Indian capitalist class can no longer do with its traditional instrument, the Congress. This is not because the Congress has become a leftist, or even a centre-left party. It is deeply right wing. It has passed most of the reactionary laws in operation in India.

The era of globalisation was initiated by a Congress government, and a Congress government has presided over the economic policies for the last decade. And what have we seen? In the last one decade, despite overall inflation, the rupee prices of motor cars, air conditioning machines, and PCs and Laptops have come down. Taking 2004 as base 100, on the other hand, the price of food has gone up in the wholesale market to 233 by February 2014. And as you all know, what we buy is the retail market price, which is higher.

This means that we, the well off middle class, managed to make a trade off, and gain slightly. Our consumer goods - the laptops, the smart phones, the cheap flights, all cost us relatively, and sometimes in absolute terms, less. So we could shrug when we had to pay more for carrot, capsicum, or tofu, saying that the laptop and the new TV cost less. The poor, who spend the bulk of their earnings on food, fuel, room rent, and transport, with very little for education, health or even less for

luxury, were being increasingly pushed to the wall.

But given that we still have a democratic political system, within limits, people can and do protest. We have had some of the world's biggest working class fight backs over the last few years, with huge general strikes which the Congress could not stop.

Between 2008 and 2011, the productivity of labour in India has gone up by 7.6 per cent. In the same period the real income of workers went down 1 per cent. The ILO's Global Wage Report 2012-13 shows the foregoing, and punctures the myth of "reforms" as aids to the poor. So the toiling people have responded sharply. We have had powerful general strikes in 2010, 2012, 2013.

In response to the strike of February 2013, The ASSOCHAM or The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry, in its press release, it stated, inter alia, that "Against its initial estimates of Rs 15,000-20,000 crore, the GDP may be eroded by about Rs 26,000 crore, it is apprehended based on the damaging effect of the Bandh on the industrial activity and the services sector like banking, finance" .

This is where Modi and his model are being welcomed. Modi has no fear of trade unions and is willing to use force to put them down. And Modi is willing to walk the extra, not just mile but hundred miles, for the benefit of capital.

The Gujarat government claims that it has generated vast numbers of jobs. This was investigated by our comrades. When an RTI was filed, the Gujarat government was tardy in replying, and instead of providing collective data, data came in bits and pieces. Instead of 65,000 beneficiaries, the number of jobs provided based on information given by the authorities in 23 districts, totals only to 51,587. Out of that 11,172 are apprentices (30.4%). i.e. the actual figure is 40,415 and not even 51,587. But, the names of only 32,372 were provided to us. Collating all the information, we got some important facts. Nobody had been given an

â€˜Appointment Letter'. What they got was a piece of paper called â€˜Employment letter', which is bad in law.

Thus, we get a picture that some 32,000 to 40,000 (at best) got some sort of unspecified jobs, while another 11,000 odd got apprenticeships. Thus, the â€˜employment' given ranged from apprenticeship to private sector employment for temporary jobs, with very few being skilled workers. The state was using its finances and officers to procure low paid workers for private capital, for example the GIDCs.

As an important aside, let me add that Gujarat holds the distinction for killing the biggest number of RTI activists in India. Not surprising, then, that Modi shouts against the RTI.

Another story we are told is, Gujarat has a great advantage for industry. So we need to understand what that advantage is. At whose cost is it coming? Tata relocated from Singur to Sanand, only partly because of agitations. The CPI(M) government was willing to use a good deal of force to put down agitations. But Modi offered a combination of force and sops. The total sops to the Tatas have been estimated at around Rs. 30,000 crores. This included 1100 acres land, and against a Tata investment of 2000 crore rupees, an interest free loan from the Gujarat Government worth 9570 crore rupees. By contrast, the CPI(M) led government of West Bengal had offered to take away peasants' land but give it to the Tatas at a subsidised rate, and give subsidy on power, tax paybacks, and some 200 crore rupees soft loan.

It should also be understood that Gujarat has long been a developed capitalist province in India. That is not to Modi's credit. What is to his credit is the way he is pumping wealth from the poor to the rich.

At this point, let me make a point to this audience. We are speaking in English, a fact that shows this is an audience of relatively educated, relatively well to do people in the main. What people of our social position are constantly told is, our taxes go to provide subsidies for the poor, who are supposedly poor

because they are lazy. In fact, the poor work hard and still get nowhere, and the tax you pay goes very little for these people. To illustrate this, I want to provide data from Gujarat. An end of 2012 data showed, Gujarat had a debt of Rs 13,89,78,00,00,000 and was paying interest worth Rs 3550 crores. Certainly it was not Ratan Tata, or Mukesh Ambani, or the Adanis, who were being bled dry to pay this interest.

So if Modi represents the leadership of a fascist force, and if Indian capitalists want this force to augment their profits, what are we to do? How do we fight them?

We must begin by becoming aware of what is being done. We are being

presented with absolutely imaginary information. Look at the media. Modi to your left and to your right. Never has the BJP been so flush with funds. But look at the reality by probing just a little. Every mainstream media, printed, TV or online, has been predicting a Modi wave. This is a manufactured lie, and its aim is to make opponents of the fascists give up the battle and to get the wavering to jump on the BJP cart. Why do I say this? The Indian Parliament has 543 seats. The best of predictions, so called, do not give even the entire NDA a majority (272). Then where is the wave? Secondly, it has been recently revealed how data distortions are done, so that a trend can be artificially strengthened. Remember 2004? AC Nielsen had predicted an

outright majority for the NDA on that occasion. Instead, the UPA formed a government with Left Front support.

Secondly, we are being presented with a supposedly straight choice – vote in Modi or defeat Modi at any cost, which translates into vote Congress. Yet Congress, in power, has done all it could for the ruling class. It is Indian capitalism that needs a so called “stable government”. We need to vote every candidate whose victory will in fact strengthen people’s struggles for rights, for justice, and to destabilise all parties who will ensure greater profits for capital and greater exploitation for the vast majority.

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[Radical Blogger](#)

In Pakistan and elsewhere: The new fascisms in the making

3 November 2014, by **Farooq Tariq**

Various forms of new fascism have emerged worldwide during the last 30 years. Among them are the Taliban and co. One of the first consequences of the phenomenal destabilising power of capitalist globalisation is the spectacular rise of new fascisms with a potential mass base. Some take relatively classical forms, like the Golden Dawn in Greece, situating themselves in new xenophobic and identity-based reflexes.

But the phenomenon that is now dominant is the assertion of fascist currents with religious references – and not with people/state, race and nation. These now pose a considerable threat in countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sri Lanka and several other African and Asian countries.

The Muslim world does not have a monopoly in this field; but it is certainly in the Muslim world that this has taken on a particular international dimension, with ‘trans-border’

movements like the Islamic State or the Taliban with their mass presence in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan and networks that are connected more or less formally from Morocco to Indonesia and even in the south of Philippines.

Fascist movements are not organically related to ‘big capital’ as was the case in Nazi Germany, but they exert fascist terror, including in daily life. Where they exist, they occupy the ‘political niche’ of fascism – and they pose new political problems for our generations of anti-fascist resistance on a large scale.

This is the most serious threat and challenge posed to progressive forces today, not only in Muslim countries but worldwide.

Not very long ago, a significant part of the international radical left considered that the rise of groups such as the Taliban had a progressive and anti-imperialist character.

However, even when a group like the Taliban confronts the United States, it represents a frightening counter-revolutionary force. Over time those who maintain these positions are fewer today, but ‘campism’ remains present in this field.

There is a rise of neo-fascist type organisations – neo-Nazi, racist and inward-looking identities. This has become a worldwide phenomenon. We are living in a period where a significant number of Muslims think that religious fundamentalism is equal to anti-imperialism. They believe that these extremists are against the US and fighting the neo-colonial policies of imperialist forces.

Neo-imperialism is intact today. Can we use this term for China and Russia? Both are capitalist powers. That is an important question.

The debate on new formations based on religion is linked to the nature of imperialism and anti-imperialism

today. The initial debates on imperialism go back to the beginning of the 20th century, to the time of the completion of the formation of nation states in the west and colonial empires and the inter-imperialist war aiming to modify the division of the world. All definitions of imperialism of that time reflect this geopolitical context.

The revolutions following the First and Second World Wars upset the geopolitical framework, with a new more complex configuration combining the opposition of revolution and counter-revolution, 'blocs' of west and east, decolonisation and zones of more or less exclusive influence, inter-bureaucratic (USSR/China) and inter-imperialist competition within this framework.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries in the nineties, the US took a leading position to dictate political and economical terms. They wanted similar economic conditions in all the countries, promoted by the World Bank and the IMF. This was met by a colossal anti-globalisation movement.

From the 1990s till today, there has been a rather radical change. Initially, the traditional imperialist bourgeoisies and states were veritable conquerors, with penetration of the markets of the east, intervention in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and so on. Then there was military stagnation, the financial crisis, the emergence of new powers (China) and the Arab revolutions.

All this led to a loss of geopolitical initiative and control, as a result of which today Washington reacts more on an emergency basis than in planning imposition of its order on the world. It was George W Bush who had the adventurist policy of invading Iraq which ended up in disaster. Iraq was a major defeat for US imperialism and things went totally out of control in the whole region particularly in Syria and Iraq. The emergence of the Islamic State has to be seen in this context.

Attempts to use Isis were made in the initial period after US failure to put a effective government in Iraq. Isis was used to replace the government of Iraq resulting in unprecedented power for the Isis not only in the region but around the world.

Overall, what we are witnessing in the Arab world is that counter-revolutions dominate - in the shape of the IS and various other formations. We are dealing today with the contradictions between capitalist states, an environmental crisis and reactionary counter-imperialist movements. These reactionary counter-revolutionary forces are the new fascists in the making, and have attracted a large portion of the middle class educated youth.

Those who have not joined these ultra-right neo-fascist trends are joining right-wing parties which are also claiming to be revolutionary organisations. Variants of that can be seen in the shape of the Pakistan Awami Tehreek and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. These new formations

in Pakistani politics are the champions of masculinity, youth, mystical unity and regenerative power of violence like the fascist forces.

Organisations like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jamaatud Dawa, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Mohammed, Jaish Mohammed are different shapes of new fascisms in the making. They all want to take over the state by military means, mainly relying on the discontent of the middle class against the system.

They all are sectarian and violent. They all want to eliminate their political opponents physically. They are against religious minorities. Thus, all the features of fascism are there apart from the fact that these new fascisms rely on religion instead of nation as was the case in classical fascism.

A united front of all progressive forces, radical social movements and trade union and peasant movements is the only answer for an effective counter reply. This united front can discuss various options including armed resistance to fight against neo-fascist forces.

Relying on the military means of the state or on US imperialism's occupational strategies will not help eliminate extremists. On the contrary, extremists can and have gained their identity of being anti-imperialists due to such attacks. However, we must be absolute clear that the anti-imperialism of extremism is a foolish concept.

Notes on the "Imperialism and geopolitics" discussion

29 October 2014, by François Sabado

Summary

Differences between the imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the globalized imperialism of the early twenty-first century have been presented in the notes of Pierre Rousset [22] and in the text of Michel Husson. [23] I would like, for my part, to highlight here two major differences between these two historical periods:

- The first is a shift in the world, with a change in the centres of gravity of the world economy (the rise of China and of emerging economic powers in Asia).

- The second difference relates to the organized workers' movement. It was developing and expanding - even though that was interrupted by the world wars and by fascism - in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. On the other hand, it is going through a historic crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

1. The shift in the world

We have to take the measure of this shift. This is not a cyclical change or shift, with a return to normal once the crisis is over... In order to measure it, we can take as a reference the turning points where the centres of gravity of the global economy change, as in 1760-1780 between the Netherlands and England, or during the inter-war period, between England and the United States ... Except that this time, it is not only a change on a continental scale, but a change to another world in the economic, social, political and cultural sense... This is a change that the West (Europe and the USA), which has dominated the world since the discovery of America, is losing its hegemony in favour of new emerging powers or old powers which are regaining their strength after four or five centuries.

1.1 In these new global relations, Europe is decline and the United States is losing its economic hegemony, even though it is still the first global military power. Much will

depend on the developments of the crisis in the USA. But the share of G7 countries in world GDP, which was 56 per cent in the early 1980s, is no longer in 2010 more than about 40 per cent. Forecasts indicate that the curves of growth between the ex-G7 on the one hand and on the other, China and emerging powers in Asia, will even cross during the coming decade; and in terms of per capita income, this could also happen in the years 2030-2040. The indications of growth in the last ten or fifteen years - around 8 to 12 per cent for China and India, against 1 to 2 per cent for Europe and 2 to 3 per cent for the USA - or in terms of global stocks, demonstrate these changes.

1.2 In this crisis, the map of the world is being redrawn and the competition is fierce.

These new relationships of forces are leading to new inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist economic tensions that can in some circumstances lead to military conflict. The decline of the United States is expressed by a crisis of its hegemony. The USA remains the principal world power, but its positions have weakened on all the war fronts of the planet. The relationships of forces have changed between the new world order of the early 1990s and the present situation.

1.3 We cannot explain the European crisis without this shift in the world. The EU wants to align the European labour market on the world market. But it is in Europe that the crisis can take on forms of a crisis of collapse due, at bottom, to its positions of weakness in global competition. Germany remains one of the principal exporting countries - 47 per cent of GDP, as against 17 per cent for Japan and 15 per cent for China - but it is also affected by the contraction of the world market. So, in order to respond to global competition, the European ruling classes want to liquidate what remains of the "European social model". There is still too much of the social and, in their eyes, it must be dismantled; that is the explanation of the speculative offensive on the European markets - the "markets", which are material realities: bankers, pension fund managers, leaders of multinationals, demand an increase in

the rate of surplus value by the lowering of wages, the liquidation of social security and increased working hours. Hence the brutality of the austerity policies - to adapt to the global labour market workforce driven by the social relations of the emerging powers - , which involves a drop in purchasing power of between 10 and 15 points over the next few years.

But also - and this is what gives a sharp, explosive character to the crisis - the kind of political construction that Europe has experienced has added to the problem: with the divergences or divergent trajectories between the various poles of the EU (Germany and the German circle - the Netherlands, Austria, Northern Europe, the southern periphery of Europe - with France somewhere in the middle)... Franco-German relations express the economic, political and institutional reality of Europe, but without a European state, without direction, without a development plan or fundamental responses to the crisis.

So this shift in the world is leading to a decline of Europe and is undermining the foundations of political democracy and the social and electoral bases of the major traditional parties. It is creating the conditions for the development of authoritarian tendencies. We see this in the relations between the Troika and certain countries of Southern Europe. But we also see it in national political crises, where the far right can be projected to the front of the political stage. Although the interests of the globalized bourgeoisie do not match those of a "national protectionist" option of the far right, a "political accident" can occur, leading the far right to the gates of power...

2. A historic crisis of the workers' movement

2.1 This new imperialist redeployment can only be understood in the new relationships of forces between the classes in the imperialist centres, marked by a historic weakening of the traditional workers' movement. In this context, what is the situation of the

workers' movement, of the left? We thought (and the Fourth International was not alone in thinking this!) that the depth of the economic crisis would lead to a new dynamic of recomposition and reorganization of the workers' movement and social movements... There are certainly experiences like that of SYRIZA, of new movements like the Indignados, but there is nevertheless a gap between the explosiveness of the situation and the political, organic expression of these movements: no strengthening of unions, of the reformist parties, of the radical left, of the revolutionary left,... or of left currents in the big organizations, nor even the emergence of new organizations, with the exception of Podemos. Admittedly, there are new forms of organization, but they are for the moment too unstable... Also, in retrospect, that is to say since the beginning of capitalist crises, there has never been simultaneously such a profound crisis of the capitalist system and a workers' movement that is so weak in the face of it (with the exception of circumstances where the workers' movement had been physically liquidated by fascism or military dictatorships).

2.2 Several factors exert a negative influence on the situation of the workers' movement:

a) The liberal counter-reforms since the late 1970s have led on a world scale to a restructuring of the work force, to its individualization, its increasing precariousness, the weakening of collective rights and of trade-union organization. Deindustrialization liquidated dozens of working-class concentrations. Not to mention the "informal" sector. Blue- and white-collar workers make up more than 60 per cent of the active population, but the social structure is not the same as before. In China and other Asian countries, industrialization has led to an unprecedented expansion of the proletariat, but we are only at the beginning of the organization of independent workers' movements, and there again, at this stage, there is no synchronization between unions, associations or parties in Europe, the United States and Asia... There is a retreat in the West and only fragile beginnings in the East...

b) The balance sheet of the past century weighs heavily on the problems of forming a revolutionary socialist consciousness: in particular the influence of Stalinism on the short twentieth century, when for millions of people there was an identification of Stalinism with communism - a twentieth century that ended in neoliberal capitalist globalization.

c) The social democratic parties and organizations have gone through a social-liberal, it would be more exact to say neoliberal, mutation. They maintain historical links with the social democracy of yesteryear. They are alternating governmental forces,

so they must distinguish themselves from right-wing parties taking into account, there too, national characteristics, but they are fully integrated into the managing of the crisis. There is no difference between social democracy and the leaders of the European right. The processes of primaries and the similarities with the Democratic Party in the USA are moving in the same direction. These parties are less and less working-class and more and more bourgeois... As for the post-Stalinist parties, they are reduced to sectarian coagulation like the PCP or the KKE; or else they tail-end the social democratic parties; or again they may resist by trying to have a policy, called "anti-liberal", but which involves running the capitalist economy and institutions. Parties like the PS in France are moving so far to the right that they leave a space for these formations, which can play their own role as long as they are not obliged to go directly into government.

d) The combination of the weakening of the workers' movement in the face of more than three decades of neoliberal attacks, plus the policies of the leaderships of the left, give the world bourgeoisie room for manoeuvre to "manage the crisis" by strengthening the positions of financial markets and deepening the attacks against the working class, indeed even, in the BRICS, improving the material situation of millions of people ... For capital, there is always a way out of the crisis if there are no working-class solutions. The problem is that the social, ecological and human cost of its "solution" is more and more terrible.