

Putin and Soviet Symbolism

In an article entitled "On the situation in Ukraine", which appeared in the Indian magazine Revolutionary Democracy of September 2022, comrade Bikram Mohan, after denouncing the imperialist and aggressive character of the so-called "Special military operation" aimed at safeguarding the interests of Russian capitalism in Ukraine, focuses on a specific aspect of Putinist propaganda: the use of pro-Soviet symbols. The question deserves to be investigated, both for the causes and consequences that it entails, and because various "fellow travelers" are trapped and confused by this propaganda.

Comrade Bikram rightly observes that after 30 years of devastating reforms, vast strata of the Russian popular masses show understanding and admiration for the Soviet past. Of particular importance in modern Russian ethos and national pride is the victory over Nazi Germany and European fascism achieved with the Great Patriotic War, which was led by the Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Stalin. The greatness and power of the State that was based on the worker-peasant alliance, under the hegemony of the working class, is an irrefutable historical fact, with which any bourgeois government in Russia must deal.

Even Putin, despite being a visceral nationalist and anti-communist, is forced, especially in times of war, to adopt, in an open or subliminal way, a propaganda based on the victories of the past. Therefore, the memory of the Soviet victory over Nazi-fascism has become a central and recurring element of present-day Putinism. The pro-Soviet propaganda element and the appeals to the common anti-fascist sentiment of the oppressed Russian masses are used to carry out a war of an imperialist character, the character of which must be hidden behind the slogans on the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of Ukraine.

Undoubtedly, far-right chauvinism and neo-fascist ideology are prevalent in the Ukrainian army, but Putin's regime is not in a political, ideological and moral position to de-nazify, both because its aims are oppressive and aimed at denying the self-determination of the Ukrainian nation; because Putin himself has close ties with neo-fascist personalities and organizations, such as Dugin and the Wagner group, as well as with other far-right organizations. The exchange between the criminals of the Nazi Azov battalion and the oligarch Medvedchuk is proof of Moscow's lies. Putin is a conscious anti-communist and his ideology is inherently anti-Soviet and anti-Leninist, as we have demonstrated in several articles published in *Scintilla*.

However, his "liberal" attitude towards Soviet symbolism and the history of the Soviet Union has spread totally unfounded speculations about an alleged ideological turn. In reality, Putin is opportunistically using the liking of large sections of the Russian people for the Soviet past for his own political purposes and for war propaganda.

The more the Putinist regime finds itself in difficulty, the more it will get bogged down in Ukraine and the more often and with greater intensity it will bring out the Soviet symbolism to consolidate and divert the masses that bear the weight of the war.

It is therefore no coincidence that in recent months the red flag symbolizing the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany, with the hammer, sickle and star, has been appearing more and more often. For example, it is exhibited in official military parades and flies on some Russian tanks in Ukraine.

The Russian media even highlights the fact that the red flag of victory flies in the cities where the Ukrainian armed forces have been expelled. Even the Russian cosmonauts waved the glorious banner, in an operation with a strong symbolic and media impact.

With this Putin wants to convey the idea that the war in Ukraine is an anti-fascist war against a fascist regime supported and armed by the US and the EU, and not an inter-imperialist war in which Russian imperialism is trying to defend by the sword, deals with its sphere of influence and its own market, perpetuating the dependent status of Ukraine, a country disputed for more than a decade between the US and the EU on the one hand, and the Russian Federation on the other.

Putin must appear as Russia's savior against the aggression of European fascism. At some level, it is positioning itself to be viewed positively, as much as Stalin is considered in Russia today. Therefore, it is of the greatest importance to point out that Putin's ideology and political and strategic goals have nothing to do with the glorious past of the Soviet Union of Lenin and Stalin.

But there is another relevant aspect that Comrade Bikram highlights.

Putin's regime has allied itself with the heirs of the revisionist CPSU, which today are mainly represented by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). The CPRF constructs its rhetoric in favor of the unjust war of partition in Ukraine based on the need to eradicate fascism and Western aggression. Furthermore, the CPRF insists that failing to complete the military operation in Ukraine would have serious consequences for Russia. This is not a coincidence. Revisionism is always on the side of capital and against the interests of the working class, regardless of the historical era or the social stages of development.

Today the CPRF is on the side of Russian capital, just as modern revisionism was against the working class and socialism in the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries. The CPRF, like other revisionist parties, does not recognize Russian imperialism because it is its permanent ally. Support for Putin's war effort is support for the destructive and aggressive character of imperialism: this has nothing to do with the struggle to rebuild the Soviet Union of Lenin and Stalin.

The revisionists of today have allied themselves with the Putin regime and support an imperialist war in which Russians and Ukrainians are being killed by the tens of thousands, creating irreparable damage to thousands and millions of other people. An unspeakable suffering that is imposed in the name of the political, economic and strategic interests of the opposing imperialisms. The Soviet flag of victory has nothing to do with this dirty war.

There must be no ambiguity in the struggle against the inter-imperialist war. Appealing to the pro-Soviet and anti-fascist sentiments of the Russian masses is a false and dishonest political and propaganda act and as such must be denounced and exposed. Putin and the revisionists are misappropriating the symbols and glorious history of the socialist Soviet Union, exploiting the just aspirations of vast Russian social strata who aspire to social emancipation, peace and brotherhood of peoples, which Lenin's Soviet Union and Stalin had won.

Aggression against Ukraine is not in the interests of the Ukrainian people, much less the Russian working class. It is therefore up to the Communists (Marxist-Leninists) of each country to reveal the true class nature of the treacherous Putinist and revisionist propaganda, to explain to the working class and the popular masses that behind this symbolism there are capitalist relations of production and an imperialist war of partition, to openly fight the social-chauvinist positions.

Putin regime's need to use Soviet symbols and anti-fascism to justify war represents a contradiction that highlights the weakness of Putinism.

But it also expresses an important change in the attitude of the oppressed Russian masses towards the victories of the socialist Soviet Union, while the neo-liberal model adopted by Putin is in serious crisis, aggravated by Western sanctions. The war in Ukraine will only accelerate the bankruptcy of the Putinist regime and capitalism in Russia.

At the same time it will bring about the revolution which will liberate Russia from capitalism and imperialism again, rebuilding proletarian socialism.