

The Putinist Left, its monstrosities and the Ukrainian national question

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For a long time now, almost everyone has been tormented by the same question: why are citizens turning their backs on the Left? Why does the Left seem so weak and lacking in credibility, all the more so since capitalism itself is not faring so well? A beginning of the answer to these questions is provided by the Left itself, or at least a very important part of it, by the way it behaves in the face of Putin's war against Ukraine. And here is why.

First of all, it is not only that this Left does not do what is obvious to any man or woman on the Left, namely to speak out against injustice and to support the victim against the perpetrator, the weak against the powerful aggressor. It is also that in trying to justify the unjustifiable, it resorts to the worst monstrosities that the Kremlin of Mr. Putin is accustomed to spout. Thus, it does not hesitate to label the crimes of the Russian army as "fake news", "false flag operations" and "provocations", or - in more moderate terms - to leave open the possibility that they might have been "fabricated" by the Ukrainian and Western propaganda machine. In any case, the Kremlin and its clients always have the same answer: the Ukrainians are bombing themselves or staging their bombings. Everywhere and always, exactly as it happened to the unfortunate Syrians of Aleppo who also bombed and poisoned themselves (by the chemical weapons of the Putin-Assad tandem). And all this with the active participation and complicity of thousands of eyewitnesses, i.e. civilians, even children, correspondents and war envoys, and other journalists, sound technicians, cameramen, etc., who have all learned the lesson to perfection and are participating in a disciplined way and as one man in a huge and diabolical... anti-Russian staging!

However, for there to be "war crimes", there must necessarily be... a war. But, let's not forget that today in Ukraine, there is no war, but a simple... "special military operation", and the proof is that whoever uses today in Russia the forbidden word "war" is immediately arrested, "judged" and sent to prison for... "defamation of the Russian army".

The consequences of such monstrosities (which are repeated over and over again) are staggering: those who utter them gradually lose all credibility, become self-ridiculing and end up becoming laughable. And this is at the opposite of what happened to their ancestors, the infamous "**fellow travelers**" of the once triumphant Stalinism, whose tradition is perpetuated today by the admirers of all kinds - and of all intensities - of President Putin. At that time, these "fellow travelers" had almost nothing to fear when they repeated the macabre monstrosities pronounced by the "great helmsman", i.e. the then tenant of the Kremlin, of whom the current tenant Vladimir Putin is a great admirer. Thus, the whole world had the misfortune to see famous intellectuals, poets and politicians of that time to come through this period unscathed, without losing any of their respectability, even though they had accepted as "flawless" the gruesome show trials of the 1930s, and as perfectly reasonable and "well-founded" accusations like "agent of the Mikado", "tsarist saboteur of the imperialists", "poisoner in the service of fascism", "conscious instrument of Hitlerism", etc., with which the protagonists of the October Revolution were condemned and executed. Then, it took a few decades of crisis and, finally, the disappearance of "really existing socialism" for these "fellow

travelers” and apologists of Stalinism to be recognized -at last- for what they have always been: **servile and ridiculous lauders of a tyrant and his inhuman regime**. On the other hand, today they are almost instantly discredited and ridiculed. Why? Obviously, because the current “fellow travelers” insist on seeing Putin as Stalin’s successor and have not realized that not only has “real socialism” disappeared long ago, but it has also been replaced by the most savage and liberticidal capitalism...

But even when they... “neoliberalize” (as the various Tsipras and other Syriza leaders are doing now), they persist in keeping their Stalinist reflexes as a kind of post-Stalinist dinosaurs of a... political Jurassic Park. Thus, they brandish the banner of Putinist “denazification” of Ukraine and the Ukrainians, as they already brandished it a few years ago, in 2016, when they were again shouting hysterically when they denounced Western imperialists for having transformed the circus of the annual Eurovision contest into a ... platform of (Ukrainian) neo-Nazism. Why? Because the Ukrainian representative (of Tatar origin) had won with a song evoking the sufferings of the Crimean Tatars deported by Stalin because they had allegedly collaborated with Hitler’s Germany.

So were the poor Crimean Tatars traitors and collaborators with the Wehrmacht, as the Greek media, led by the Greek Left, proclaimed in those days of 2016? The answer is of course as negative as it is for the dozens of other nationalities, peoples and minorities of the then USSR, who were deported on the orders of Stalin and Beria under exactly the same motive: traitors and collaborators. And it is not only that among these “punished peoples” were included the Greeks of the USSR, both those that spoke Greek and the Tatar-speaking Muslims of Greek origin (the Urum). Nor that most of the Tatars were deported as “quislings” to Central Asia right after their demobilization from... the Red Army with which they had fought against the Third Reich. It is also that the Soviet state itself rehabilitated the Tatars and cleared them of this scandalous accusation after the death of Stalin! And even better, it is that Putin himself did the same thing , by decree, immediately after the annexation of Crimea in 2014!

The conclusion is that all those Leftists and Greek media of all kinds, who ranted for days about the Eurovision “scandal” and raved against the “Nazism” of the Tatar people, had consciously chosen to stick to the Stalinist “version” of history, deliberately ignoring the real facts, including the repeated official stances of the USSR as well as of the current Russian Federation! And all this when we know very well that the frequent massacres of the Tatars have been for centuries a kind of favorite “safari” for Great Russian (tsarist) nationalism and that 46,2% of the Tatar population has been exterminated during the first three years of its deportation, which makes this murderous deportation (which is however still applauded by a very large part of the Greek Left!) one of the most obvious GENOCIDES of the last century! And also, that the remaining Tatars tried in vain during decades to return... on foot to their Crimea. And finally, that the courageous Russian general - and hero - of the Red Army Petro (Pyotr) Grigorenko (communist till the end and founder of the illegal “Union for the Rebirth of Leninism”) spent many years incarcerated in... psychiatric hospitals in the USSR for having devoted his life to defend these martyred Tatars of Crimea...

Of course, it is quite futile to try to find what could connect our Putinist Leftists with someone like General Grigorenko, who declared, even when he was imprisoned by his executioners, that “my party are the Bolsheviks”. They have absolutely nothing in common. In fact, it is certain that none of them has even heard of the name Grigorenko. Just as none of them knows anything about the young men and women Left-wing activists from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia who are fighting, some of them with weapons in their hands, against Mr. Putin and his cronies. The reason for this ignorance is obvious: How could they know about them when they stubbornly refuse even to publish their poignant appeals and repeated messages addressed to the Left of Western Europe?

Here is one of the main causes of their ignorance on the Ukrainian question, which pushes them to

spout, with their usual arrogance, their well-known “geopolitical” nonsense and other pretentious “analyses” that have nothing to do with reality. Indeed, how can they know what is going on in Putin’s war when they want to have nothing to do with Left-wing activists in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, and when they get their “information” exclusively from reactionary and counter-revolutionary sources such as Stalinist archives and Putinist monstrosities? And even worse, how can they mobilize - as it should be their class and internationalist duty - to save the Belarusian railway workers that the dictator Lukashenko has just decided, by decree, to condemn to death (!) because they sabotaged the movements of the Russian army, when our Putinist Leftists permanently refuse even to publish on their websites the dramatic calls for solidarity of these same Belarusian railway workers now threatened with execution? And of course, by stubbornly denying any link with the young radical Marxists and trade unionists of these countries, who are fighting heroically (yes, heroically!), often gambling their freedom or even their lives in incredibly difficult conditions, our Leftists end up ostensibly abstaining from processes - already underway - aiming to develop not only activist networks of solidarity, but also initiatives working to create the new radical European Left that is so much needed in these times!

It is therefore because they are unaware of the centuries-old colonial relationship that Tsarist and Stalinist Russia has had with Ukraine, that they are not only unable to understand but even to become aware of the existence of the Ukrainian national question for centuries. The direct consequence of this is their inability to understand that the main objective of Putin’s war, which Putin himself publicly admits, is the violent disappearance of the independent Ukrainian state, which is the sine qua non for the rebirth of the Russian empire that has always been advocated by the Great Russian chauvinism that is now back in power in Moscow.

In reality, what most of our Leftists seem to ignore is that **Putin’s ongoing war against Ukraine is just the latest of countless bloody attempts by Great Russian nationalism to dominate Ukraine, violently repressing and crushing the Ukrainian people’s aspirations for national independence.** For example, they would certainly have seen the war and Putin’s ambitions in a completely different light if they had known that, even in its early years, the young Bolshevik revolutionary Russia showed the same Great Russian chauvinism by refusing - sometimes using mass violence (!) - to recognize the Ukrainian Bolshevik party and the independent Ukrainian Soviet Republic, and even going so far as to forbid Ukrainians to... speak their own Ukrainian language! And if this catastrophic and even criminal treatment of the Ukrainian people ended with the intervention of Lenin and Trotsky who, after a fierce struggle at the top of the Bolshevik party, “created” - as Putin rightly admitted in his televised speech of February 22 [\[1\]](#) - an independent Ukraine within the framework of the Soviet Confederation, the good times only lasted a few years. Stalin, the “brutal Great Russian bully” according to Lenin, ensured the return to tsarist barbarism, and worse. For he was the one responsible for the terrible famine of 1932-1933, which starved to death at least 3 to 5 million Ukrainians, and pushed hundreds of thousands others to... cannibalism (!). And because he was also to blame for the definitive closing of Ukrainian schools, theaters and cultural institutions which kept alive the language and the traditions of the Ukrainian nation.

It is obvious that this Left-wing insists on “ignoring” the countless centuries of suffering inflicted on the Ukrainian people by Great Russian nationalism. On the other hand, it does not seem to ignore the outrageous accusations about the almost congenital “nazism” of Ukrainians that Putin is making more and more often in order to justify his current war against Ukraine. As much is said and written in our country about the allegedly “Nazi” past of the Ukrainian nation, it is worth recalling here the following undeniable historical truths: *“During World War II, Nazi Germany recruited about 250,000 Ukrainians into its armed forces and auxiliary police, while 4.5 million Ukrainians served in the Soviet Red Army, which was 40% of its total forces. They participated in the major battles that repelled and defeated Germany during the war. As a result, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic*

suffered the greatest human and material losses of all Soviet republics" [2].

In other words, the "Nazi" past of the Ukrainians is as real as the "Nazi" past of the Crimean Tatars, the Greeks of the USSR and some dozens of other ethnic groups and martyred peoples who were deported by the Stalinist regime under the sordid accusation of collaboration with the Nazi occupier. After all, if we want to talk about the collaboration of a part of the Soviet population with the Wehrmacht and Nazi Germany, which did exist, we should logically start with the (Russian) Red Army general Andrei Vlasov and his - not insignificant - "Russian Liberation Army", which joined the Wehrmacht and fought with it...

So these are some of the reasons why the citizens, who are neither fools nor sheep, are turning their backs on this Left, which is destroying everything good it has done, with its reactionary, false, conspiratorial, inhumane and certainly repulsive position on a matter of such historical dimensions as Putin's war against Ukraine. Ultimately, the problem of the Left is not bourgeois and capitalist reaction, which is just doing its job. The problem of the Left is the Left itself, when it does not do its own work, which results in the loss of its credibility and its appeal to the masses of the oppressed.

We conclude with a text written exactly a century ago, in 1922, but which could have been written today to refute one by one the theses and practices of the Putinist and Putin-leaning Left on the national question and, more particularly, on Putin's war against Ukraine. This is the second of the three parts of the **"Notes" left by Lenin, on "The Question of Nationalities or "Autonomisation"**. The "vulgar Great-Russian bully" to whom he refers is obviously Stalin, whom Lenin names several times in the other two parts of the same text. Let's read it, because, apart from anything else, it is oxygen and fresh air, because it gives an idea of what could be another Left that attracts and inspires rather than the one of today that repels:

Continuation of the notes.

December 31, 1922

In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it. It is sufficient to recall my Volga reminiscences of how non-Russians are treated; how the Poles are not called by any other name than Polyachiska, how the Tatar is nicknamed Prince, how the Ukrainians are always Khokhols and the Georgians and other Caucasian nationals always Kapkasians.

That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or "great" nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view.

What is important for the proletariat? For the proletariat it is not only important, it is absolutely essential that he should be assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle. What is needed to ensure this? Not merely formal equality. In one way or another, by one's attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate the non-Russian for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the "dominant" nation subjected them in the past.

I think it is unnecessary to explain this to Bolsheviks, to Communists, in greater detail. And I think that in the present instance, as far as the Georgian nation is concerned, we have a typical case in which a genuinely proletarian attitude makes profound caution, thoughtfulness and a readiness to compromise a matter of necessity for us. The Georgian [Stalin] who is neglectful of this aspect of the question, or who carelessly flings about accusations of "nationalist-socialism" (whereas he himself is a real and true "nationalist-socialist", and even a vulgar Great-Russian bully), violates, in substance, the interests of proletarian class solidarity, for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice; "offended" nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of this equality, if only through negligence or jest- to the violation of that equality by their proletarian comrades. That is why in this case it is better to over-do rather than under-do the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities. That is why, in this case, the fundamental interest of proletarian class struggle, requires that we never adopt a formal attitude to the national question, but always take into account the specific attitude of the proletariat of the oppressed (or small) nation towards the oppressor (or great) nation.

Lenin

Taken down by M.V.
December 31, 1922

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Footnotes

[1] See our previous articles **"What "defensive war against NATO" are they talking about? When Putin refutes the "theories" of his Western Left-wing fans":**

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article62260>

"Lenin is the author of today's Ukraine" or how it's all the fault of...Lenin and the Bolsheviks": <http://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article61979>

"Against the ravages of campism and for the victory of the Ukrainian people-The mass movement against the war!": <http://europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article61921>

"Нет войне! Non à la guerre Нет войне!" (in French) :

<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/yorgos-mitralias/blog/030322/net-voine-non-la-guerre-net-voine>

[2] **"How the Ukrainian Working Class Was Born-An interview with Marko Bojcun":**

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2022/03/ukrainian-working-class-formation-ussr-nato-war-national-identity>

and also "**The Independence of Ukraine: prehistory of a Trotsky's watchword**" by Zbigniew Kowalewski: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article61474>