

What progressive anti-imperialism is needed ?

Introduction : challenges of a  
progressive anti-imperialism

# Current International Situation

- Aside from a few isolated states like Cuba and North Korea, every country is now essentially capitalist.
- First, the return of inter-imperialist rivalry as the key factor in world politics and an end to the illusion promoted by some liberals that the expansion of world trade and investment has rendered geopolitical competition a thing of the past. For example rise in economic exchange between china and USA, but no diminution of tensions on the opposite
- Second, an intensive push by both the US and China to rally second-tier imperialists and others behind their banners to strengthen and expand their geopolitical blocs. The scope for smaller states to balance between the two big imperialists is dwindling.

# What progressive anti-imperialism is needed?

- From Ukraine to Taiwan, Eurasia has once again become the epicenter of a major confrontation between the great powers (USA, China, Russia).
- However, the analysis of imperialism and genuine anti-imperialist practice today poses a number of problems for various sections of the left, as we have seen with the case of Ukraine and Syria, or the refusal to consider Russia and China as imperialist powers.

# What progressive anti-imperialism is needed?

- 2 main reasons:
  - 1) The main problem today is that imperialism is not understood as a system but as an actor (very often reduced to the United States).
  - 2) Before the end of the USSR, in the rivalry between the USSR and the USA during the Cold War, the USSR was seen by some as a post-capitalist society, and therefore sided with the USSR against the USA. This is still the case today, and some see today's Russia as the successor to the USSR, an anti-imperialist player. What we call Campism, one of the legacies of the Cold War, sees Russia and its allies (Iran and Syria) as both progressive and imperialist states, leading them to sing the praises of imperialist Russia and authoritarian states “challenging” US imperialism.

# Challenges among the left

- Multipolar world system vs unipolar
- The “main ennemy is at home”

A multipolar world?

# A multipolar world?

- Many movements on the left promote a vision of a multipolar system within international relations, as opposed to a unipolar world dominated by the imperialist United States.
- At the same time, multipolarity has become the keystone of the shared language of global fascisms and authoritarianisms. It is a rallying cry for despots, that serves to dress up their war on democracy as a war on imperialism.



# A multipolar world?

- The unfortunate consequences of sections of the Left to a commitment to a multipolar vision of the world are illustrated very starkly in the case of its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- They have indeed legitimised and amplified (to varying degrees) Russian fascist discourse, by defending the invasion as a multipolar challenge to US-led unipolar imperialism.

# A multipolar world?

- On 30 September, while announcing the illegal annexation of four Ukrainian provinces, Russian President Vladimir Putin **spelt out** what multipolarity and democracy meant in his ideological framework.
- He defined multipolarity as freedom from the attempts by Western elites to establish their own 'degraded' values of democracy and human rights as universal values; values 'alien' to the vast majority of people in the West and elsewhere.

# A multipolar world?

- As Putin played to the justifiable outrage at the long list of crimes by Western countries – including colonialism, imperialism, invasions, occupations, genocides, and coups – it was easy to forget that his was not a speech demanding justice and reparations and an end to these crimes.
- In fact, by asserting the self-evident fact that the Western governments did not have “any moral right to weigh in, or even utter a word about democracy,” Putin skilfully cut people out of the equation.

# A multipolar world?

- The language of 'multipolarity' and 'anti-imperialism' also finds resonance in Chinese hyper-nationalist practices and discourses.
- A [joint statement](#) by Putin and Xi in February, shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine, stated their shared rejection of universally accepted standards of democracy and human rights, in favour of culturally relativist definitions of these terms: “A nation can choose such forms and methods of implementing democracy that would best suit its [...] traditions and unique cultural characteristics [...] It is only up to the people of the country to decide whether their State is a democratic one.” These ideas were explicitly credited by the statement to “the efforts taken by the Russian side to establish a just multipolar system of international relations.”

# A multipolar world?

- For Xi, the “universal values' of freedom, democracy, and human rights were used to cause the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, the ‘colour revolution,’ and the ‘Arab Springs’, all caused by the intervention of the US and the West.”
- Any people’s movement that demands widely accepted human rights and democracy, is treated as an inherently illegitimate imperialist colour revolution.

# A multipolar world?

- Even amongst the Hindu-supremacist leadership in India, there are strong echoes of the fascist and authoritarian discourse of a “multipolar world” – where civilisational powers will rise again to reassert their old imperialist glory, and the hegemony of liberal democracy will give way for right-wing nationalism.
- Mohan Bhagwat, head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, said [admiringly](#) that “in a multipolar world” that challenges the US, “China has now risen. It is not bothered about what the world thinks about it. It is pursuing its goal... (returning to the) expansionism of its past emperors.” Likewise, “In the multipolar world now, Russia is also playing its game. It is trying to progress by suppressing the West.”

# A multipolar world?

- Such ideas also reflect [attempts](#) to incorporate Hindu-supremacists into a global network of far-right and authoritarian forces.
- The Russian fascist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin (much like Putin) [states](#) that “Multipolarity [...] advocates a return to the civilizational foundations of each non-western civilization (and a rejection of) liberal democracy and human rights ideology.”

# A multipolar world?

- It is odd that the Left has made the language of polarity its own. The discourse of polarity belongs to the Realist school in international relations. Realism sees the global order in terms of the competition between the foreign policy objectives, assumed to reflect objective 'national interests', of a handful of 'poles' – Big Powers or aspiring Big Powers.
- Realism is fundamentally incompatible with the Marxist view which is premised on the understanding that 'national interest', far from being an objective and value-neutral fact, is defined subjectively by the “political (and therefore moral) character of the leadership strata that shapes and makes foreign policy decisions”



# A multipolar world?

- For instance, Vijay Prashad, one of the most prominent enthusiasts and advocates on the global Left [for multipolarity](#), approvingly observes that “Russia and China are seeking sovereignty, not global power.” He does not mention how these powers [interpret](#) sovereignty as freedom from accountability to universal standards of democracy, human rights, and equality.
- Such a Left formulation offers no resistance at all to the fascist/authoritarian projects which describe themselves as champions of anti-imperialist “multipolarity”. In fact it offers them a cloak of legitimacy.

# A multipolar world?

- We weaken our own democratic struggles when we choose to view the struggles of others through a distorting campist lens.
- Ours is not a zero-sum choice between unipolarity versus multipolarity. In every situation, our choices are clear: we can either support the resistance and survival of the oppressed – or we can worry about the survival of the oppressor.

# A multipolar world?

- When the Left takes upon itself a 'duty' to support the survival of 'multipolar' regimes (in Russia, China, and for some on the Left, even Iran and Syria), it fails in its actual duty to support people fighting to survive authoritarian and murderous practices by these regimes. Any benefit the US might get from its material or military support to such struggles, is outweighed by far by the benefit of survival for people who would otherwise face killing and authoritarian policies
- Tyrannical regimes construe support for people resisting them, as support for foreign or imperialist 'interference' in the 'sovereignty' of those regimes. When we on the Left do the same, we serve as enablers and apologists for those tyrannies. Those in life-or-death struggles need us to respect their autonomy and sovereignty to decide what kind of moral/material/military support to demand/accept/reject.

# A multipolar world?

- To resume, this emerging multipolar world of bourgeois states does not create better conditions to challenge global imperialism, but merely preserves and even heightens these capitalist dynamics.
- Rather than seeing multipolarity as opening up space for revolutionary struggles against imperialism, contemporary multipolarity functions as a new stage of the global imperialist system,

# BRICS no alternative to capitalism

- **FOR EXAMPLE, THE NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK, WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2015 BY BRICS COUNTRIES, IS NOT** an alternative to Western banking institutions for the global South.
- The New Development Bank recently formalised its partnership with the World Bank.
- China has increased and consolidated the third-highest voting power in the IMF, even gaining some at the expense of global South countries such as Nigeria and Venezuela.
- Public-private partnerships and institutional investors represent ways Saudi Arabia, China, Brazil, etc. develop new nodes of accumulation — and perpetuate existing ones in collaboration with the West.

“The main ennemy is at  
home”

# “The main ennemy is at home”

- Some sections of the left and anti-war movements, especially in the UK and the United States, have refused to act in solidarity with Ukraine resistance to Russian invasion or various uprisings (Syria, Hong Kong, etc...) under the pretext that “the main enemy is at home.”
- In other words, it is more important to defeat the imperialists and bourgeoisie in our own societies, even if that means implicitly supporting the Assad regime or Russian and Chines states.

# “The main ennemy is at home”

- Among these sections of the left, communist thinker Karl Liebknecht is frequently cited. Liebknecht is famous for his 1915 declaration that “the enemy is at home,” a statement made in condemnation of imperialist aggression against Russia led by his native Austria–Germany. In quoting Liebknecht, many have decontextualized his views.
- From his perspective, fighting against the enemy at home did not mean ignoring foreign regimes repressing their own people or failing to show solidarity with the oppressed.
- Indeed, Liebknecht believed we must oppose our own ruling class’s push for war by “cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists.”



# “Marxists need to be champions of self-determination”

- So, while of course true, especially in the case of the US state, which remains the biggest opponent of progressive social change in the world, that does not mean anti-war movements opposed to their own states should be agnostic about other international and regional imperialisms or popular revolutions.
- Marxists need to be champions of self-determination. At the same time, today as a century ago, our defense of self-determination needs to be informed by an understanding that no imperialist power can be counted on as an ally.

# Conclusion

# Selective criticisms

- Focusing on only certain aspects of US influence at the expense of addressing the complicity of other states in the global economy—working alongside the US's *other* aspects of dominance—only *selectively* critiques global imperialism.
- Indeed, the mainstays of the anti-war left are forced into a position that centers only on dismantling US militarism while unable to offer positive support to democratic movements in other regimes as they grow closer to capitalist economic integration.

# Genuine anti-imperialist praxis

- Our alternative is not subscribing to the Western establishment's line of demarcating Western liberal "democracies" from the "authoritarian" regimes of the global South. Instead, we must recognize the uneven adoption and development of authoritarian strategies of governance across geopolitical milieus
- Recognizing this unevenness is important because different kinds of authoritarianism require different movements and strategies to combat them.
- a genuine anti-imperialist praxis should take into account how states learn from each other and develop their own repressive regimes of control.

# “my enemy’s enemy is my friend”

- We should not fall for the politics of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” and support Washington’s main imperial rival, China, nor lesser ones like Russia. They are no less predatory and avaricious imperialist states, as Beijing’s record in Xinjiang and Hong Kong attests, as does Moscow’s similarly brutal one in Syria and Ukraine.
- Instead, the left must build international solidarity from below between oppressed nations like Palestine, Ukraine and Taiwan, as well as exploited workers in both the U.S. and China and throughout the world. This project is not an abstraction, but a necessity and possibility.

# Genuine anti-imperialist praxis

- From this analysis of authoritarianism and imperialism, we can imagine what a genuinely socialist “multipolarity” can look like: assembling anti-authoritarian movements together to strengthen democratic institutions from the global to the local.
- This goal demands more than simply statist forms of sovereignty or relying on the reshuffling of power between nation-states against the backdrop of declining US hegemony.
- It is imperative to build alliances between movements struggling against different forms of rising authoritarianism.
- At the same time, we must understand that for movements acting within illiberal, authoritarian states, the latter becomes nearly impossible without the basic freedoms afforded by bourgeois democracy.

# Conclusion

- At the same time, we should not actually believe that imperialist rivalries on the global level between Russia, China and the USA, as impossible to overcome when their interests are at stake and that the relationship of interdependence are actually very present. All these regimes are bourgeois powers that are enemies of popular revolutions, only interested in a stable political environment allowing them to build and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes.
- Antagonistic cooperation as explained by Bukharine (in one of his book entitled Economic of the period of transition) on the world capitalist system as a contradictory unit to explain the significant tensions and even violent can exist between capitalist states , while continuing the same world process of capital accumulation.
- The role of progressive forces is not to choose between two imperialist or sub imperialists forces that compete for political gains and / or the exploitation of more resources or of other peoples, this understanding undermines the anti-capitalist struggle putting aside the fact that the struggle of the progressive forces must always be in favor of the interests of the working and popular classes in their struggle for liberation and emancipation against all forms of imperialisms and by their struggles challenge the global imperialist system.
- To choose an imperialism over another is to guarantee the stability of the capitalist system and exploitation of peoples.

# Conclusion

- Our political compass must not be magnetized by the capitals of great international powers like Washington, Beijing or Moscow, but by the courage, indignation and resistance of peoples in struggle. As Che Guevara said: "If you tremble with indignation at every injustice, then you are one of my comrades".
- In the face of the military escalation that today accompanies the balance of power between the great powers, and which is fraught with danger, let us affirm the internationalist solidarity of the world's working classes against all forms of imperialism, exploitation and oppression.



# Questions

- How to rebuild or build anti-war movements with the new dynamics of the imperialist system?
- How to maintain an independent and internationalist leftist position in international struggles against imperialism, in which political actors leading these struggles are bourgeois or / and even sometimes reactionary (Palestine, Ukraine, etc...)?
- How to combine efforts between different countries for internationalists? What tools? Forms of organisations?