

Slavoj Žižek: From pseudo-left to new right

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The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has joined the ranks of German professors agitating against refugees, including the historian Jörg Baberowski, the social scientist Rüdiger Safranski and the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. In the January 16 edition of news weekly *Der Spiegel*, the prominent representative of postmodernism and adherent of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has published a commentary whose class arrogance, unconcealed racism and call for a strong state eclipses the contributions of his colleagues. On January 27, in an interview with the daily *Die Welt*, Žižek developed the positions he put forward in *Der Spiegel*.

Žižek's emergence as an open right-winger is particularly significant because he has long tried to pose as an opponent of capitalism and even as a "Marxist" or a "post-Marxist." In pseudo-left circles of intellectuals and semi-intellectuals he has been celebrated and courted accordingly. He has received professorships and visiting professorships as well as numerous invitations to speak at international symposia and lectures. He has appeared with Alex Callinicos, the leader of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and a spokesman of the pseudo-left International Socialist Tendency, at many events, including the Marx21 Congress in Berlin.

In *Der Spiegel*, Žižek gives free rein to his hatred and contempt for the oppressed and disadvantaged. His article "A Carnival of Underdogs" culminates in the sentence: "Brutality towards those weaker animals, women, is a traditional feature of the 'lower classes.'"

Like all right-wing propagandists, Žižek cares little for facts and seizes on individual cases—real or invented—to slander whole social or ethnic groups. This technique is well known from the anti-Semitic inflammatory writings of the Nazis, only this time it is not Jews, but Muslims, who are the scapegoats.

The starting point of Žižek's tirades are the events of

New Year's Eve in Cologne, which he terms an "obscene carnival of the lower classes." The incidents in Cologne have been systematically blown out of proportion by the media in order to whip up a hysterical campaign against immigrants and Muslims. To date, there is no evidence that anything happened other than what regularly takes place in similar mass gatherings where much alcohol is involved.

But this does not prevent Žižek from taking things even further. He compares the events in Cologne with the perverse orgies of violence in Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* in order to make migrants comprehensively responsible and to denounce "frustrated young immigrants" as fascists.

He repeatedly warns the readers of *Der Spiegel* not to be swayed by sympathy for the fate of refugees. "Even if many immigrants are more or less victims who have fled from devastated countries, this does not prevent them behaving despicably." And, "The fact that someone is at the bottom, does not make them automatically a voice of morality and justice."

The assumption that "behind the vicious circle of desire, envy and hatred" (feelings he sweepingly ascribes to immigrant youth) there lies "any deeper human core of global solidarity" Žižek calls "part of a naive, humanist metaphysics."

He fumes against "the politically correct liberal left," which is mobilizing its resources to downplay the incident in Cologne, and refers to "efforts to enlighten immigrants" as "breathtaking stupidity." They did not behave out of ignorance in Cologne, but "because they want to violate our sensitivities."

Following one of his idols, the French philosopher and Maoist Alain Badiou, Žižek divides mankind into "three kinds of subjects"—a "Western, 'civilized, bourgeois, liberal-democratic subject"; "those who do not belong to the West and who are obsessed by their longing for the West"; and finally, "those fascistic

nihilists whose envy of the West is transformed into a deadly self-destructive hatred.”

The colonialist model of this scheme is obvious. On one side, the civilized West and the local elites who are obsessed with the “longing for the West”; on the other side, the barbarian savages whom the West must bring under control in cooperation with the local elites—the “white man’s burden”, as it was called by Rudyard Kipling. Under the banner of such conceptions, the imperialist powers have committed unspeakable crimes in the past 150 years and massacred millions of people.

Žižek’s practical conclusions go exactly in this direction, as he explained in more detail in his interview with *Die Welt*. They would garner him applause at any Pegida rally and qualify him for membership in the far-right Alternative for Germany.

“Europe needs to demand of the incoming Muslims that they respect European values,” he says, and, “Europe cannot just open its borders, as some on the left demand out of a feeling of guilt.” Instead, “we” must ensure “that the streams of refugees flow in an orderly fashion,” and set up “reception centres in the countries bordering Syria, but also in Libya.” This, he insists, must be done “with the military.” In other words, Žižek wants to send European troops to Libya, Jordan, Lebanon and other states to imprison refugees there.

Žižek explicitly defends European capitalism with its millions of unemployed and its dramatic inequality. “I do not want to bad-mouth capitalism in principle,” he says. “The European model” is “threatened by two types of capitalism, both undemocratic,” by the “fundamentalist market radicalism of the American model” and by “Asiatic-authoritarian capitalism, as practiced mainly in China.” But “Europe’s capitalism,” on the other hand, has “something to offer to the world.”

Racist incitement against refugees, the demonization of the “lower classes,” the closing of borders, the defence of one’s “own” capitalism against its international rivals and a return to militarism—this is the programme of the new right, which Žižek advocates here.

This is no surprise for the *World Socialist Web Site*. We have warned for years that the policy of the pseudo left represents the interests of more affluent layers of the middle classes and is directed against the interests

of the working class. They have replaced the historical materialist method of Marxism with the subjective, irrational theories of postmodernism and the class struggle with various forms of identity politics, which focus on issues of race and sexual orientation.

Five years ago, we wrote on the occasion of an appearance by Žižek in New York:

“Žižek is an outgrowth of a reactionary anti-Marxist and anti-materialist tradition that descends from the irrationalism of Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger. He eclectically draws on the neo-Nietzschean and neo-Heideggerian thought of 1960s French post-structuralism...

Žižek, “as with the post-structuralists and the post-Maoists, is a political opportunist, though crasser and ruder. Despite all the radical-sounding bluster he pumps off, when it comes down to real politics, not the political phantoms in his brain, his positions end up serving interests that are completely hostile to the international working class and to genuine socialism.”

The sharp social polarisation accompanying the intensification of the crisis of capitalism forces Žižek and his ilk to show their true colours. They can no longer hide their right-wing politics behind pseudo-left phraseology. From that standpoint, Žižek’s transformation from an ideologist of the pseudo-left to an open right-winger is an unmistakeable sign that fierce class battles are ahead.



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