

Notes on the pseudo-left

A portrait of an opportunist coalition in Los Angeles, California

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The inaugural meeting of the “Coalition for Peace, Revolution, and Social Justice (CPRSJ)” was held on July 14 in Los Angeles, California. A project of Socialist Party USA and a handful of anarchist and feminist groups in the Los Angeles area, the coalition advertised itself online as “a new anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist, and anti-militarist coalition.” This writer investigated.

One might have been forgiven for assuming that the terms “authoritarianism,” “imperialism,” and “militarism” related in the first instance to the United States. Instead, at the inaugural meeting of this coalition, which was attended by about 20-30 people, it emerged that the denunciations of authoritarianism, imperialism, and militarism were directed with special emphasis against Iran, Russia and China.

Kevin B. Anderson, University of California at Santa Barbara sociology professor and a member of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization, made this plain in his remarks to the meeting. He stressed the need to oppose the “wing of the peace movement” that fails to criticize Russia and China as imperialist. He proposed slogans and banners for the coalition to bring to future demonstrations in Los Angeles such as, “Stop Russian and Iranian imperialist war in Syria.”

In addition to these dubious political positions, the meeting was remarkable for the internal dynamic that developed. A great deal was said about “inclusiveness,” “focusing on agreements and not disagreements,” “listening,” and “coalition building.” But not five minutes into the question and answer session, it was announced that the speakers’ list would be interrupted in the case of any “microaggressions,” suggesting that one audience member was already guilty of one. One woman sharply denounced the panel, consisting of three men and one woman, for being “male dominated,” indicating that she had wished her organization (Code Pink) to be represented. (She was promised a seat on the next panel.) Another attendee pointed out that the panel had failed to mention the disabled and “ableism.” An audience member who questioned the designation of Russia and China as “imperialist” was branded a “white male lefty.”

The term “working class” was not used once during the entire

meeting. This social formation clearly does not form an integral part of any perspective being advanced by this coalition. Instead, more than one speaker’s analysis of the United States was that Trump has been produced by “white supremacy,” which was described as the “essential” political characteristic of America.

Meanwhile, there was something truly sinister about the deliberate effort to channel anti-war demonstrations behind denunciations of “Russian imperialism” and “Iranian sub-imperialism”—effectively transmuting popular sympathy for the Syrian population into justifications for more imperialist war. This is not terribly unlike the method of the *New York Times*, which exploits images of suffering children to justify “humanitarian” bombing campaigns.

Judging from the question and answer session, it must be said that this coalition is not off to a very promising start. No three people attending the meeting seemed to be from the same political organization. Many attendees were obviously there for one purpose only: to advertise their own coalition, group, tendency, picnic, demonstration, protest, fundraiser, newspaper, committee, or blog.

The meeting opened (30 minutes late) with the remarks of Frieda Afary, a member of a group calling itself the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists. The origins, program, and perspective of this group were not explained. The purpose of the speech was to praise the Arab Spring, the “Syrian revolution,” and the “Green Movement” in Iran, together with the Occupy movements in the United States and around the world.

According to this speaker, these movements have begun to recede as a result of sexism, class bias, homophobia, religious fundamentalism, and misogyny. They had also failed to be sufficiently “inclusive.” She warned of the dangers posed by the “authoritarian left,” meaning the political tradition that includes Lenin, Trotsky and the Russian Revolution. (This remark gave additional meaning to the group’s “anti-authoritarian” slogans.)

With respect to Syria, she claimed that the Assad regime was using ISIS and other religious fundamentalist movements

against the Syrian Revolution. She denounced interference in Syria by Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. As for the United States, Afary claimed that it was mostly standing “on the sidelines,” and that it would be ridiculous to allege that the United States would do anything that might help “the revolution.”

Russia and China were characterized as “state capitalist” (even up to the present date, apparently) as well as imperialist. It was then claimed that Nazi Germany was also state capitalist and imperialist—thus establishing that Russia and China are the modern equivalent of Nazi Germany.

Zach Medeiros of Socialist Party USA followed up these remarks with a speech in favor of “solidarity” with the “Syrian revolutionaries.” As to what groups, organizations, events, or even social classes are involved in the Syrian revolution, much was left unexplained. “Local coordinating committees” were praised and represented as the “central core of the Syrian revolution.” The so-called “White Helmets” also came in for praise. He denounced everyone who refuses to support the “Syrian revolution” as “Syria’s enemies.”

Assad was described as a “fascist” who perpetrated gas attacks against civilian populations. Madeiros denounced what he called “ridiculous conspiracy theories,” including the idea that the US was supporting anti-Assad forces, and presumably also including Seymour Hersh’s recent article describing the Syrian attack on Khan Sheikhoun on April 4 as a conventional (not gas or chemical) weapons attack on a meeting of anti-regime Islamists.

Madeiros raised a demand for “direct humanitarian intervention”—in the context, this could only mean intervention by the Trump administration—as well as the slogan, “stand with Syrians.” A glance at the Socialist Party USA web site reveals that this organization is devoting a great deal of its efforts to campaigns in support of the “Syrian Revolution.”

The meeting’s panel also included Javier Sethness, whose affiliation is to the “Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation.” This self-described anarchist made no attempt to relate his speech to the two previous ones, devoting his 15 minutes to praising “communalist, autonomous, and indigenous movements” in Latin America. It is probably not necessary to describe in detail the sort of jargon that filled these 15 minutes. He advanced the remarkable demand to “halt economic growth.” He called for a “worldwide neo-Zapatista revolution.” Sethness went out of his way to praise Bakunin and call for future revolutionary movements to be guided by a new “utopia.”

During the question and answer session, the theme emerged that “more organization” was needed, but no concrete measures were proposed or adopted. This is a common problem for the pseudo-left. It is acceptable in this milieu to divide one’s allegiance among numerous different political organizations at the same time, as a matter of personal preference. One joins a coalition to promote oneself and one’s views, but does not

necessarily feel any loyalty to it.

There were also complaints that, despite founding this new coalition on the lowest common denominator, the organizers had failed to draw any new faces other than the ones that had already appeared in all the previous coalitions. Here, too, in concrete political experience, is a demonstration that the opportunist formula—the more you water down your program, the more people you can attract to meetings—does not always correspond to reality.

Even so, at least two attendees fretted about the use of “divisive” and “elitist” language, which ordinary people would not be able to understand. Another individual questioned the coalition’s ten “principles of agreement,” claiming that the American population does not care about what happens overseas. One attendee simply shrugged her shoulders and said, “I’m not seeing it,” meaning the coalition was not going anywhere.

As noted, when one person challenged the designation of Russia and China as imperialist, the response was to label him a “white male lefty.” It was explained that “white male lefties” think they have all the answers but need to learn how to listen. There was a general murmur of approval as the “white male lefty” was put in his place. As proof of the fact that Russia is “imperialist,” Zach Medeiros cited the recent *New York Times* article alleging war profiteering by Russian contractors in Syria. (See: “New York Times voices moral outrage over profiteering military contractors ... in Russia”)

Here is the pseudo-left in all its glory. Identity politics, in particular, has developed into a reign of terror in this milieu. Hostile to the working class, obsessed with gender and race, deeply subjective, aligned with imperialism, back-biting and jostling for personal advancement, these middle class layers inhabit a political encampment that is located ten thousand political miles from the workers’ movement—and, in terms of its positions on Syria, not too many political yards from the US State Department, the *New York Times* and the CIA.



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