

Russian Pabloites push for a “broad left” amid growing social discontent, advanced US preparations for regime change

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The Russian Socialist Movement (RSM) group affiliated with the Pabloite International Secretariat has recently intensified its push for the construction of a “broad left” alliance. Contrary to what the name suggests, this alliance is of an extremely right-wing character: it would include not just Stalinist but also fascistic forces as well as Alexei Navalny, the central figure in the US preparations for a color-revolution scheme to topple the Putin-regime in Russia and replace it with a more direct client regime that would be entirely subservient to the interests of imperialism.

Its ultimate aim is to block the growing social and political opposition within the Russian working class from developing into a socialist movement, and to provide a left fig leaf for the advanced preparations for war and a regime change operation in Russia. Since the imperialist-backed, far-right coup in Ukraine in February 2014, the imperialist powers have been engaged in economic warfare against Russia and advancing preparations for a regime change operation aimed at replacing the Putin regime with one directly compliant with the interests of imperialism.

The war crisis has exacerbated an already significant political and social crisis. The Putin regime and the oligarchy it represents have responded to the pressure from imperialism with a combination of the promotion of militarism and nationalism, attempts to find a negotiated settlement with imperialism and, last but not least, growing attacks on the working class.

The most significant among them, so far, has been the raising of the retirement age, announced in the summer of 2018. The pension reform was correctly perceived by broad sectors of workers, youth and intellectuals as something of a declaration of social war by the oligarchy. Over 90 percent of the population opposed it. Nevertheless, the Kremlin has been able to push through the pension reform. In October, Putin signed the bill into law, raising the retirement age by five years for both men (from 60 to 65) and women (from 55 to 60). This was in no small part due to the political role played by the RSM.

Amid mass opposition to the pension reform last summer, the RSM stepped forward with the proposed alliance of the “People Against” (*Narod protiv*) to prevent this opposition from finding a left-wing political expression. The alliance consisted of supporters of Alexei Navalny, a notorious racist who has marched at several fascist demonstrations, the Stalinist Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and the fascistic Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), which is headed by the notorious chauvinist and anti-Semite Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. None of these forces had, at any point, any interest in preventing the raising of the retirement age.

The KPRF has for decades worked as the “official” opposition to the Putin regime: its main political function has consisted in intervening in social protests and strikes to stifle them, and in promoting far-right nationalism and Stalinism under the banner of “communism.” Zhirinovskiy’s LDPR has likewise closely worked with the Putin regime, while engaging in far-right demagoguery.

The WSWS commented on these protests by noting that “the barely disguised purpose of this alliance is to derail and disorient popular opposition, so the pension cuts can pass. While *Narod Protiv* calls on protesters to issue impotent appeals to Duma deputies not to approve the cuts, it admits that the Duma will approve the bill anyway.”

This assessment has been confirmed. Since then, the Duma has approved the pension reform with slight changes and, starting this year, the Russian government has started to gradually raise the retirement age. The RSM has responded to these developments by redoubling their efforts to push for the construction of an alliance with supporters of Navalny and other right-wing tendencies.

In a programmatic article entitled “The broad left: myth and reality,” published on the RSM’s Russian website anticapitalist.ru on January 11, Ivan Ovsianikov made the case for a “broad left,” writing: “The idea of a ‘broad left’ is again in the air. Even bourgeois experts who notice a social quest for left politics and dissatisfaction of the population with the popular parties, spell it out today.”

In another article published on the international Pabloite website International Viewpoint on February 7, Ilya Budraitskis concluded that the main reason for the “defeat” of the protests against the pension reform was the lack of willingness on the part of the RSM’s right-wing allies, above all Navalny and the Stalinist KPRF, to work for the alliance proposed and pushed for by the RSM.

He lamented that “both KPRF’s and Navalny’s organization did not contribute to the creation of a potential social movement against pension reforms for different reasons. The ‘The People Are Against’ campaign, which was founded by independent trade unions, was obviously conceived as a prototype of such a movement.”

The “broad left” proposed by Budraitskis and Ovsianikov is a political fraud and trap. It is aimed not only at diverting social opposition, but also at providing forces involved in the US preparations for a regime change in Moscow with a “left” cover.

This goes, in particular, for their promotion of the so called “independent” trade unions with whom the RSM maintains close collaboration that have for decades been complicit in the systematic suppression of the class struggle. Sections of the “independent” trade union leaderships also maintain open ties to the pro-US liberal

opposition. The head of the “independent” auto trade union MPRA, Aleksei Etmanov, for instance, has been a member of the liberal party Yabloko which is notorious for its ties to the State Department and various CIA outfits.

As for Navalny: He is a well-known racist and stooge of US imperialism. In the past, he has repeatedly participated in the far-right “Russian March,” shouting slogans like “Russia to Russians.” He has also called Chechens “cockroaches” in a video unambiguously calling for their murder. Since 2010, he has been deliberately built up by the US state and media as a supposedly “liberal” opponent of Putin who could lead a color revolution type movement in Russia, by uniting far-right, liberal and pseudo-left forces. (See also: What does Russian “opposition leader” Alexei Navalny represent?)

Vastly unpopular among the majority of Russians, Navalny has recently been trying to tap into the growing social discontent by focusing more on presenting his fight against “corruption” as a social struggle, and by creating the so called Navalny trade union. The RSM has worked systematically to provide credence to these fraudulent efforts of Navalny.

The line advanced by the RSM is based on opposition to any independent politics for the working class: If you don’t support Putin, you have to support his imperialist-backed opponent.

Budraitskis, writing alongside with Ilya Matveev (also RSM) and the American academic Sean Guillory, for *Jacobin* Magazine, which is closely associated with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), stated back in 2017, “Leftists should prove themselves as Putin’s most consistent and active critics, not as Navalny’s opponents.” They should, the article continued, “show unconditional solidarity with its democratic demands, and support and develop the socially progressive elements of Navalny’s program. ... The Left, both in Russia and all over the world, must embrace this opportunity for the future democratization and the realization of social justice in Russia.”

The support for Navalny by the RSM is of a piece with its unconditional backing of the imperialist-orchestrated, far-right coup in Ukraine in February 2014. Back then, Budraitskis endorsed the participation of the far-right in the Maidan, writing: “Without the ultra-right proponents of a ‘national dictatorship’ from the Right Sector, there would never have been any barricades on Hrushevskoho or occupied ministries turned into ‘headquarters of the revolution.’”

What the RSM and their allies in *Jacobin* now called “democratization and the realization of social justice in Russia” are the equivalent of a Maidan-style operation in Moscow with consequences that would be even more deadly and catastrophic than the five-year long civil war in Ukraine, which has cost up to 10,000 lives. A regime change operation in Moscow would not only almost certainly trigger a civil war and bring to power a far-right regime, dedicated to enacting the demands of US imperialism and attacking the working class. In a country with the largest nuclear arsenal after the United States, it would also raise the immediate danger of a broader war and a nuclear catastrophe

The right-wing positions advanced by the RSM flow from the history of the Pabloite tendency and the social interests it represents.

Historically, the Pabloites emerged as a revisionist tendency within the Fourth International that attacked the internationalist foundations of the Trotskyist movement and sought to liquidate it into the Stalinist parties and bureaucracies, as well as into social democracy and national bourgeois liberation movements. To the Stalinist bureaucracy, which had just engaged in a genocide of Marxists and Trotskyists, they ascribed a revolutionary role. Instead of the

overthrow of the bureaucracy in a political revolution by the working class, and an extension of the socialist revolution internationally, they advocated for pressuring the allegedly “reformist” faction of the bureaucracy.

This perspective culminated in their open support for the restoration of capitalism by the bureaucracy, starting with the “perestroika” program under Gorbachev in 1985. In this process, the Pabloites rendered the Soviet bureaucracy and imperialism the invaluable service of providing the social counter-revolution against October 1917 with a “left” and even Trotskyist fig leaf, thus blocking any opposition to it from the working class and creating substantial confusion about what Trotskyism represents. Already then the Pabloites marched next to pro-market liberals, open nationalists and even fascists, to support the restoration of capitalism.

They thus bear substantial political responsibility for the socio-economic and political disaster created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and capitalist restoration. Russia is today the most unequal of all major economies in the world with the top 1 percent owning as much as one third of the country’s net wealth, and the top 10 percent of income earners own two-thirds. Meanwhile, the bottom 50 percent of the population own less than 5 percent of the country’s net wealth.

The RSM speaks for narrow layers of the upper middle class in Moscow, St. Petersburg and some of the other major cities that have been able to climb up the social ladder owing to their support for and participation in the restoration of capitalism by the Soviet bureaucracy. However, they still feel disadvantaged by the oligarchs in power and lay claim to a larger share in the spoils. In their orientation toward open collaboration with imperialism and the “liberal” faction of the Russian oligarchy, they see a way to advance their own social interests and participate more directly in political affairs.

Under conditions of a reemergence of the class struggle internationally, the growing attacks on the working class in Russia through the raising of the retirement age as well as the expected layoffs in the auto industry by the American auto company Ford, will sooner rather than later trigger significant social and political struggles by industrial workers as well as broader sections of the population.

However, any significant social and political movement in Russia will inevitably raise directly the question of the fate of the Russian Revolution, the restoration of capitalism in Russia and the struggle of Trotskyism against Stalinism. None of these issues can be clarified outside the building of a Russian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. This struggle has to be conducted in opposition to the criminal machinations of the Pabloites who for decades have sought to prevent the building of the Trotskyist movement and to disorient working class opposition through alliances with nationalist and pro-imperialist forces.



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