

# **The rise of bourgeois nationalism and the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat**

## **A growing phenomenon at the international level**

The venom of bourgeois nationalism is again poisoning the international political atmosphere. For the first time since the Second World War the big imperialist powers and the rising ones, the big and the little capitalist countries run by conservative and reactionaries forces, are pervaded at the same time by many forms of chauvinism.

From the USA of Trump to the Russia of Putin, from the Japan of Abe to the Turkey of Erdogan, from the China of Xi Jinping to the India of Modi, from Poland to Switzerland, from France to Germany, from Belgium to Austria, as far as Eastern Europe, in many imperialist and capitalist countries a wave of bourgeois nationalism, of fanatical patriotism, is arising.

The present situation, characterized by the severe consequences of the economic crisis of 2008, by unequal development, by the sharp struggle for markets, for raw materials and spheres of influence, favours the spread of chauvinism among the dominant nations and the dominated ones.

Generally, the parties and movements that give expression to a nationalist and chauvinist policy are increasing their influence among the subordinate classes and are assuming a growing political and electoral weight.

The USA of Trump, an imperialist country in decline, is the herald of this dangerous phenomenon. Behind the slogan “Make America Great Again”, we are seeing a remarkable change of line followed by US imperialism, both in home politics and at the international level.

Donald Trump became President after an electoral campaign characterized by nationalism in its most poisonous forms. His extreme political, economic, cultural nationalism, that goes along with the white racism and Islamophobia, expresses a chauvinist and ultra-reactionary conception of the world. Typical of the Trump government is the tendency to give priority to the national interest, to economic protectionism, in order to defend the profits of US monopolies and to weaken the rival powers.

Without doubt the ultra-nationalist and fiercely counter-revolutionary politics of Trump favour the spread of this poison in other countries.

In Germany the party of the extreme right, nationalist and fascist, the AFD (Alternative For Germany), is now the third largest parliamentary party.

In Italy the nationalist beast, which sees its most violent expression in the fascist groups, is again raising its head with demagogic arguments against immigrants and the “national humiliation”.

In social-imperialist China too, great-State chauvinism has become so aggressive that the revisionist CPC (which has always revealed openly nationalist positions internally) is having difficulty controlling that trend, after having favoured it for decades, especially in school-programs, in which millions of children daily receive massive doses of patriotic education in order to undo the humiliation of foreign occupation and to exalt the Han nationality.

Vladimir Putin is also a nationalist; he is championing a Russia characterized by a mix of Slavic tradition and orthodox Christianity.

## **The nature and aims of bourgeois nationalism**

Bourgeois nationalism is an aggressive policy of the ruling class in the sphere of the internal relations of their national States and towards other nations that has its basis in the exploitation of the working class, the rivalry between capitalists and the subjugation of oppressed countries.

The development of bourgeois nationalism has many definite manifestations and consequences in the field of the home and foreign policy of the imperialist and capitalist countries.

First, it is a tool in the hands of the exploiting and reactionary classes to divide and corrupt the working class, prevent its union to demolish capitalism, undermine the solidarity of the workers and the peoples with lethal prejudices.

Second, it is a means for the preservation and strengthening of capitalism and the bourgeois dictatorship, where a small handful of profit-makers rules society and uses the State machine to crush the working people.

Third, bourgeois nationalism creates a sharper international situation and increases the danger of new armed conflicts between imperialist and capitalist powers. It is one of the deadliest weapons in the hands of the most reactionary, chauvinist and warmongering elements of financial capital, it represents their interests, to advance their policy of war against the workers and peoples.

This political ideology, under whatever mask it hides, from the demagogy of national honour to the respect of the “rights” of the stronger nations, is always connected to the robber’s war of imperialism. It is a direct impulse to militarism, to rearmament, to neo-colonialism, to annexations, to the affirmation of the supremacy of the stronger nations; therefore it is a powerful motivator for oppression and genocide against other peoples. It is an integral part of the preparation of the masses for a war aiming at a new division of the world and to prevent the development of a large anti-imperialist movement.

Today, just as yesterday, bourgeois chauvinism is a dangerous menace to the working class and the oppressed peoples.

In a situation of worsening inter-imperialist contradictions, the bourgeoisie of the ruling powers regards the “defence of the national interests” as the pretext for conducting a criminal policy of oppression and exploitation of its own peoples, and of despoliation and enslavement of other peoples.

Therefore, the chauvinism of the imperialist and capitalist countries, the spur to organize the class around national institutions and the “fatherland” of the exploiters, will be increasingly the fundamental nucleus of any bourgeois policy.

### **Some characteristics of the present bourgeois nationalism**

Although bourgeois nationalism is a phenomenon that has different conditions and takes specific forms in various countries, reflecting the positions of the reactionary classes, their interests, the traditions and tactics in the struggles against their enemies inside and outside, etc., it is still possible to point out, especially in the imperialist and capitalist countries governed by reactionary, populist and militaristic parties, some common elements of this tendency.

- A growing economic protectionism and commercial obstructionism (duties, protective rules, state intervention, etc.), to control the means of production, help the national enterprises and prevent the penetration of other States into the internal market, in the conditions of a constriction of world trade and in the conditions of a merciless competition among international monopolies and imperialist countries.

- The recovery of the national “greatness” and sovereignty against the “globalization of the markets”, the hostility towards the supranational institutions of financial capital that limit or remove powers, resources and spaces for the dominant classes of various countries.

- The tendency to ignore laws, treaties and international agreements (political, commercial, juridical, etc.), fully breaking them or violating them in individual cases.

- The creation of “fortress States”, the closing and armed defence of the frontiers (for instance, in the EU this means “to bury Schengen”) in order to prevent the entrance of “the others”.

- The xenophobia and intolerance towards the workers coming from other countries, represented as “invaders” and “enemies”; the discriminatory practices towards foreigners.

- The idea that the State territory must give hospitality only to one nationality; the suppression of the rights of the national and ethnic minorities.

- The construction of a national history through the myth of common descent; the falsification,

historical revisionism, anti-scientific and reactionary ideas ( “purity of blood”, the rediscovery of the “chosen” peoples, etc.).

- The defence of the traditional religion (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) and its conservative values, against the penetration of other religions.

### **The relation between chauvinism, neoliberal policy and the economic crisis**

The present bourgeois nationalism is not conceivable as a simple “return to the past”. We have to understand it in relation to its class roots, the movement of the classes and their struggle in the present context.

The growing influence of nationalism and chauvinism cannot be explained by a late rediscovery of the national identity (just as modern racism is not based on “biological prejudices”, but on cultural elements); on the other hand it must be explained by the political importance that nationalism acquires in a society ravaged by decades of new free-trade policies, by the destruction caused by the recent world capitalist crisis, by the hyper-competition for markets and spheres of influence, by the increase in the contradictions between the imperialist and capitalist powers, by the mass migrations produced by imperialism.

The wave of nationalist and chauvinist feelings that arises in many countries is nourished by the sense of rancour, powerlessness, and the rejection of the policies imposed by international financial capital and its institutions (cuts to social expenditures, assaults on the rights of workers, privatisation, bail-outs of banks, etc.), combined with the fear of a further worsening of the conditions of life and work. This feeling is particularly widespread among the western middle-classes that are losing many positions acquired in the earlier historical period.

In conformity with this point of view, the present warlike and xenophobic nationalism is a reply of some sectors of the dominant class to the crisis of the free-trade-policy model, for managing in a chauvinist and reactionary manner both the discontent and social protest and the mass nationalist and patriotic feelings, attributing the present problems to external factors (first to immigrants “invaders”).

In Europe the bourgeois nationalist forces have found a fertile field owing to the austerity and neoliberal politics, as well as owing to the unbridled collaborationism of the traditional social-democratic forces.

Their advance happened after and the exhaustion of the attempt of the radicalized “left-wing“ petty-bourgeoisie to guide the social protests (Podemos, Syriza, etc.). These nationalist right-wing forces with their populist and xenophobic demagogy have exploited the anti-globalization feelings and worries of the working masses, taking up the political space of the traditional liberal and reformist parties, which, in order to maintain big capital, dismantled the rights of the workers, unemployed, young people, pensioners and women, and completely abandoned the antifascist principles, spreading among the masses reactionary and racist positions.

With great benefit for themselves, the liberal and reformist parties have defined the mass movements against the EU, the TTIP, the austerity measures, the war policy of NATO as “nationalist” and “protectionist”. So the reactionary and fascist forces have the opportunity of presenting themselves as “the true defenders of the nation” against the globalization.

In fact, the bourgeois nationalist parties, while increasing their prestige with slogans such as “masters in one's own home”, do not give up the free-trade policy, do not want the recovery by the working class of the conquests lost because of the action of the liberal-democratic parties, and are even incapable of lightening the conditions of life of the great masses. On the contrary, they are ready to increase the authoritarianism, to destroy the workers’ organisations and sharpen the discriminations against the poorest and the immigrants.

The policy of these reactionary forces, even if they say that they will defend the victims of globalization, is always devoted to the defence of some section of the imperialist bourgeoisie (especially the sector of it tied to the military-industrial complex) and centred on the working of the

capitalist market and on the strengthening of the State as the fundamental tool for the support of the monopolies in the international competition and the apparatus for the repression of the exploited masses.

So they are parties that interpret in a nationalist sense the free-trade policy (national-free-trade policy), with a clear tendency to economic protectionism, to the cuts to social expenditure, to institutional conservatism and to the war policy abroad.

### **The nefarious role of social-democracy**

A particular role in the spread of nationalist ideas and in the clouding of the workers' conscience is played by the social-democratic leaders, genuine specialists in the spreading of confusion and division in the ranks of the working class.

For many decades the social-democratic leaders covered their nationalism with talk about "our common western values" and Europeanism, spreading concepts and programs better fitting the requirements of monopoly capital.

In the last years the music has changed and their nationalist policy has revealed itself, especially towards foreign workers. Gradually the social-democrats have opened the way to the fascists and racists, stating that they were no more dangerous.

Today the social-democrats enter into direct competition with the nationalist and fascist right-wing forces that are acting openly and are spreading their delirious chauvinist and xenophobic discourses.

The social-democratic and reformist ministers have even managed to criminalize altruism and solidarity, as with the NGOs that save the lives of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.

In all countries the leaders of the social-democratic parties support the measures of the exploiting classes and apply them directly when they are in the government. They demand great sacrifices from the workers in the name of "national unity", "sense of duty", etc.

In every country they share with the right-wing parties the policy of keeping the migrants far from their boundaries, at the cost of havoc of the sea and crimes in the detention camps.

In all countries they cover the imperialist wars of aggression with their sugary rhetoric, presenting them as "humanitarian" actions or "struggles against terrorism".

Without the aid of the social-democratic and reformist parties, the bourgeoisie could not conduct its anti-workers, reactionary and warmongering policy. Social-democracy is based on nationalism, not on proletarian internationalism. This political movement has always adopted nationalism to instil bourgeois patriotic sentiments into the minds of the working class, celebrating the victories in the imperialist wars, exalting the values of the bourgeois armed forces, spreading the cult of love for the imperialist fatherland, etc. Therefore there is no essential difference between the demagogy of the social-democratic leaders and that of the bourgeois nationalists.

They both strive with every means to keep the working masses away from the class struggle against the capitalists, divide and corrupt the workers and poison the popular masses with their reactionary ideology. Both undermine the class conscience of the exploited with their demagogy about "common national interests". Both try to present the interests of the capitalists and those of the workers as one and the same.

The rise of bourgeois nationalism is parallel to the sharpening of the crisis of old social-democracy (as in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc.). This crisis, started in the 1980s and destined to last a long time, is the result of the end of the "Golden Age of capitalism" and of the predominance of the free-trade policy, to which social-democracy has adjusted itself with a policy of submission to the financial oligarchy, with the liquidation of the Welfare State, with a series of counter-reforms, with the weakening of the mass trade-unions.

This has led substantial sectors of the workers and the working masses to lose confidence in the social-democratic parties, to criticize them harshly and to abandon them on the electoral and organisational level.

Today the mass discontent is captured by the populist and fascist right-wing parties, which use aggressive nationalism as one of the major vehicles of their policy. Also from this point of view we must denounce the fact that the social-democrats have opened the door to the rising wave of bourgeois nationalism. The two phenomena are interlinked.

It is foreseeable that the more unprejudiced social-democratic sectors will move to a further right-wing position, establishing their own nationalism and fascistisation (in the form of a “left”, “radical” nationalism, etc.), manipulating some backward sectors of the proletariat and co-operating with the forces of the more extreme reaction.

### **The “defence of national unity” with the imperialists**

As we have already said, nationalism is one of the methods preferred by the ruling classes in order to divide and immobilize the workers and take them out of the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie, through the spreading of ideas and doctrines aimed at weakening and denying the struggles of the exploited and oppressed classes against capitalism, and replacing them with the struggle among the exploited and oppressed people.

The principal aim of bourgeois nationalism is to cause the division and breaking up of the proletariat under the more deceptive pretexts, as, for instance, the defence of the interests of the nation, the defence of the culture and the identity of the peoples.

One of the tactics preferred by the bourgeoisie is the proclamation of the sacred “national unity”, of “national defence”.

These proclamations aim to instil in large sections of the proletariat the idea that there can exist common interests between antagonistic classes, that there can be a just war lead by the bourgeoisie.

So they serve to spread confusion and division in the ranks of the working class and to prevent it from taking up independent and revolutionary positions hoisting the flag of proletarian internationalism.

The bourgeois slogans about national unity favour the establishment of “states of emergency” in which the freedoms of the workers are suppressed; these “states of emergency” are the prelude to the calls to arms of the proletarians for the war of their own imperialism against other imperialisms, nations and peoples.

In order to get these reactionary slogans accepted by the popular masses, the bourgeoisie creates the impression that there are good nations and bad nations (“rogue States”), there are peoples with violent characteristics, peoples evil by nature. The ruling class hides its responsibility in the aggression wars against other peoples under a thick demagogic curtain, in the war crimes that it perpetrates, claiming that imperialism is not the cause of the problems, the bourgeoisie is not the principal enemy of the proletarians, but other nations and social groups, while it claims to defend peace, freedom, democracy, etc. In this way the ruling classes of the opposing camp are encouraged to do the same thing, resulting in the peoples being driven to the slaughter.

In reality, the imperialist bourgeoisie has nothing to do with the true national interests; it is in direct conflict with them. It is a parasite in the belly of the nations, and its agents are dangerous extraneous bodies in the ranks of proletariat.

Only the interests of the working class, its proletarian internationalism, are in harmony with the interests of the oppressed nations and peoples.

### **The tasks of communists and of class-conscious workers**

In the present situation of economic, political and social instability of world capitalism, of the sharpening of all its contradictions, the revolutionary proletariat must face the inescapable task of stressing the struggle against national-chauvinism and the menace of fascism, increasing the activity in the ranks of the working class and among the popular masses, maintaining the firm commitment to revolution and socialism.

As comrade Lenin taught us, we have the task of struggling daily and concretely against every form of bourgeois nationalism. It must do this against the warlike, violent, openly chauvinist nationalism, or the more sophisticated nationalism which hides behind calls to “equality” of nations” while it promotes the division of the working class according to nationality, or finally against the social-chauvinism of the reformists and opportunists.

In this struggle the principal task is the education of the workers and the exploited and oppressed working masses in the spirit of proletarian internationalism and of the international solidarity of the workers and peoples.

The communists must show in practice that the working class is conducting a resolute struggle for the solidarity, closeness and union of the proletarians of all countries and all nationalities, for the unity of the class struggle against the common enemy, world imperialism, against national oppression and in defence of brotherhood and national equality. This task is even more important today, in a situation in which the inter-imperialist conflicts become more acute.

It is necessary to conduct the struggle against nationalism connecting the ideological aspect to the concrete and urgent demands of the workers, according to the present level of class consciousness and sentiments of the masses.

We have to oppose the chauvinist propaganda and conduct counter-propaganda in a simple way, understandable to the young workers and the unemployed, to the poor people, putting their real interests at the centre of our action.

Clearly, fighting against bourgeois chauvinism does not mean to offend the feelings and national pride of the great working masses, it does not mean falling into national nihilism.

On the contrary, we must explain that are bourgeoisie and fascism to cause the ruin of the nation, that proletarian internationalism and socialist revolution mean the salvation of the nation and of popular culture, their free and independent development.

Likewise, fighting against chauvinism must not make us forget the indispensability of support for national liberation movements of the oppressed countries which tend to strike, to weaken and to break down imperialism.

In our propaganda we have to clarify the class character of chauvinism, the pillar of bourgeois tyranny, and its ruinous consequences for the workers. We have to explain that in “the first place” of the policy of the bourgeoisie nationalist forces is not the national interests, and even less the interests of the workers, but the profits of the monopoly groups that support these forces. We have to demand the regularisation and parity of wages and rights for immigrant workers, the abrogation of the racist laws and measures. This is very important, in consideration of the economic and social basis of present-day nationalism.

The revolutionary proletariat must be the pioneer of the unity of the working class in the struggle against every form of chauvinism, national hate, racial and religious prejudice, the most determined defender of the oppressed nations, the pioneer of the struggle by all means of the dependent and colonial countries against imperialism.

What is necessary is to work, in each context, in order to unmask all the social-patriotic, chauvinist and bourgeois nationalist positions and phrases, and to explain that the freedom and independence of nations are unthinkable without the revolutionary break with imperialism, without the defeat of the bourgeoisie of the oppressor and oppressed countries.

In the imperialist countries it is necessary to oppose utterly the policy of the “sacred union”, of the “governments of national unity”, of “national emergency” and of “national defence”, spreading and sustaining the slogan “NO to national unity with the imperialists”.

Most of all in the imperialist countries, in the oppressing and war-mongering States, it is necessary to struggle resolutely against all types of occupation and imperialist violence – first of all the violence of one's own imperialism – for the independence of the colonies and the liberation of the oppressed nations, for the complete equality of rights of nations, for the right of self-determination, up to secession, for all the oppressed nations, for the sovereignty, freedom and national independence of the peoples against the oppression and the exploitation of imperialism and

capitalism.

The aid to the struggles for the self-determination of the peoples is a constant of internationalist practice. Only the revolutionary policies of the proletariat defend in a consistent way the sovereignty, freedom and independence of the peoples, which coincides, in most cases, with the interests of the revolution and socialism. Therefore we have to call for the common struggles of the proletariat of the oppressor nations and of the revolutionary movements of the proletariat of the oppressed nations and colonies.

As far as concerns the struggle for peace and against imperialist war, we emphasize the necessity to concentrate the activity against the principal imperialist instigators of war at a particular moment, and the necessity to combine the struggle against the war with the struggle against reaction and fascism, to strengthen the struggle against the arms race among the imperialists, against the establishment of police States, for the withdrawal from the warmongering alliances (such as NATO) and the withdrawal of the troops sent abroad, for the support to the struggles and liberation wars of the peoples subjugated by imperialism.

We must give particular attention to the struggle against chauvinist ideology, in order to free the masses from xenophobic prejudices and to struggle against the preparation of a new world imperialist war.

It is up to us to fight the ideological mystifications and the falsifications of the history of the peoples, enlightening the working classes about the past, connecting the present struggles to the revolutionary traditions.

We have the task of mercilessly denouncing and unmasking the sophisms and rhetoric of the social-democrats and the trade union bureaucrats, the shameful class collaboration policy, the policy of sacrifices “for the national interest”, the social-patriotism, social-imperialism, pacifist phrases that mask the imperialist and war-mongering plans of the bourgeoisie.

We must conduct this struggle with particular energy within the workers’ movement and also within the ranks of the progressive and communist parties, chiefly in those that are working in the imperialist countries, in which the ideological influences and prejudices of the imperialist bourgeoisie and reformism are variously reflected.

Owing to the growth of chauvinism and fascism, the work for the development of the policy of a proletarian united front and, on its basis, of a popular front, is an imperative task for all communists and revolutionaries.

We have to try our best for the establishment of popular, anti-fascist and anti-imperialist fronts (or alliances, blocs, coalitions, etc.), which gather – under the leadership of the proletariat – the small farmers, the impoverished urban workers, the masses of the oppressed nationalities, the genuine progressive and democratic forces, on the basis of a program of specific demands of these sectors of workers, in line with the fundamental interests of the proletariat.

The decisive question for the formation of these popular fronts is the resolute action of the proletariat for the defence of its own interests in combination with the defence of the demands of the other exploited working people.

Clearly, in each country there exist a certain number of crucial questions, of fundamental demands, which the large masses of the workers support. The formation of the popular fronts can be accelerated around these demands.

January 2018

**Communist Platform – for the Communist Party of the Proletariat of Italy**