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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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02.10.2022

## ***Putin's annexation speech and the bankruptcy of Russian nationalism***

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On Friday, September 30, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a lengthy speech that was meant to justify the ruling regime's actions in annexing four new territories to Russia through referendums: the Donetsk, Luhansk (Lugansk), Zaporozhzhia and Kherson regions in eastern and southeastern Ukraine.

The speech underscored the danger of a widening conflict between Russia and NATO, as the Putin regime will now consider the annexed Ukrainian lands as its own and will fight for them much more actively, as confirmed by the recent announcement of a partial mobilization in the wake of Russian defeats in the Kharkiv region.

In his speech, Putin, justifying the annexation of four regions of Ukraine, said, "People have made their choice, an unambiguous choice." The official figures about the outcome of the referendums are indeed astonishing: in all regions 97 percent or more voted for annexation, and the turnout also showed very high participation of the population.

However, it is necessary to ask: How was it possible to hold a referendum in Zaporozhzhia, when almost half of the territory, including the capital, is controlled by the

Ukrainian Armed Forces? The Putin regime has no answer to this. It is likely that the figures were simply taken out of thin air and exaggerated.

The same applies to other regions where referendums were held. Half of the Donetsk region is under Ukrainian control. The only region in which the entire territory is under the control of Russian forces is the Luhansk region. But even there, the question of the truth of the published results requires clarification.

Putin went on to state, “We will defend our land by all means. We will rebuild all the destroyed cities and towns. We will develop enterprises, infrastructure, and health care systems.” The first sentence deserves special attention because it suggests that the Putin regime is once again threatening to unleash a nuclear war.

If a nuclear war were to happen, the “development” of enterprises, infrastructure and the health care system would be out of the question. Suffice it to recall that almost 400,000 people died in Russia as a result of the government’s reactionary response to COVID-19. And that is only according to official figures. What prevented the Putin regime from engaging in the “development” of health care and social infrastructure earlier?

The main reason for the promises of the Putin regime is the ruling oligarchy’s serious fear of the working class, which, amid the worsening crisis of capitalism, is threatening to pursue its independent interests. Fear is the main motive behind all these promises since the Putin regime desperately needs a stable “home front” for its national-chauvinist response to the onslaught of Western imperialism.

“They want to see us as a colony,” Putin notes in his speech. “They do not want equal cooperation, but plunder.”

While Putin’s remarks about the threat of the colonialization and carve-up of Russia are no doubt correct, they also underscore the dual psychology of the Russian ruling class, which both hopes for “equal cooperation” with Western imperialism and at the same time rattles nuclear weapons in the struggle to safeguard its privileged position in a country rich in raw material resources. In the same speech that was filled with condemnations of the imperialist powers, Putin referred to “co-thinkers” of the Kremlin “in the entire world, including in Europe and the United States.”

Putin sought to falsely imbue a progressive tone to his national-chauvinist response to the threat posed by US-NATO imperialism. For example, as part of his speech he said that he was proud that in the 20th century it was Russia that opened the anti-colonial movement. A very hypocritical statement from a man who justified the invasion in a speech on February 21 by condemning the 1917 October Revolution and the supposedly bad Bolsheviks led by Lenin.

In fact, what preempted the carve-up of the former Russian Empire by the imperialist powers was the Bolshevik Revolution and the struggle waged by the Red Army under the leadership of Leon Trotsky on the basis of an internationalist program of socialist revolution. This program is politically incompatible with the reactionary nationalist policies and actions now pursued by the Putin regime.

Seeking to broaden public support for his policies, Putin declared: “The unipolar world built by the West is anti-democratic, false and hypocritical to the core.” This is certainly true, but Putin forgets that these features Western imperialism are the very features that are also characteristic of the Russian capitalist state.

Putin continued, “The world has entered a period of revolutionary transformations, they are of a fundamental nature, new centers of development are being formed, which are ready not only to declare their interests, but also to defend them.” Coming from Putin, these words have a blatantly demagogic character. Apart from the leaders of the imperialist powers, no one fears revolution more than the Russian oligarchy. However, Putin seeks, in the hope of broadening support for the war, to exploit popular hatred of imperialism by portraying his government as a defender of national independence.

Putin did not mention that his concern is not over the independence of the Russian people, but the independence and right of the Russian oligarchy to exploit Russia’s natural resources and working class without considering the opinion of its “Western partners.”

Putin ended his speech by quoting these words from the far-right Russian nationalist ideologist Ivan Ilyin, who supported the struggle of the White armies against the Bolsheviks’ Red Army during the civil war:

“If I consider my homeland to be Russia, it means that I love, contemplate and think in Russian, sing and speak in Russian; that I believe in the spiritual forces of the Russian people and accept its historical destiny with my instinct and my will. Its spirit is my spirit; its destiny is my destiny; its suffering is my grief; its flourishing is my joy.”

On Friday, Ukraine submitted an application for accelerated NATO membership, further escalating the conflict. The course of the proxy war between Russia and NATO in Ukraine threatens to escalate into an open conflict in which the use of nuclear weapons is possible. All this underscores once again the insanity of the ruling classes of all capitalist countries.

Ultimately, all of Putin’s statements emphasize that he is basing his response to the onslaught of imperialism on national-chauvinism. It cannot be otherwise, since Putin embodies the capitalist restoration regime in Russia. His reactionary policies reflect the socio-economic role of the ruling Russian oligarchy, which emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the false and blatantly counter-revolutionary policies of Stalinism.

But the struggle against imperialist war requires a revolutionary strategy. This is possible only on the basis of the principles that the Bolsheviks adhered to when they made the October Revolution in 1917. The essence of these principles is to mobilize the working class against capitalist governments throughout the world on a program of world socialist revolution. The resolution of all the contradictions of capitalism and the problems it generates is only possible within the framework of an international reorganization of society, or rather a reorganization of the entire economy, not for private profit but for the satisfaction of social needs.

This inevitably brings us to the question of resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. Only the Trotskyist movement represents a genuine vanguard revolutionary movement of the working class. It is on this basis that the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Russia, Ukraine, and around the world must take place.

**World Socialist 01.10.2022**