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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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29.02.2024

Ukraine, Year Three (II)

The Transformation of Russia

The Russia of today is not, nor will it be, the USSR of yesterday, but the logic of the struggle between capitalism subordinated to the state characteristic of Russia and Western transnational capitalism is giving rise to a transformation of great importance for the whole world.



How the Struggle Between Capitalists 'Sovietizes' Their Leaders

Although in a different sense than all the parrots that appear in this video, it is true that the reason for the war is not NATO, nor the advance of NATO. The geopolitics of the siege of Russia is not a cause, but a consequence of the clash of interests between two capitalisms.

In the 1990s, post-Soviet elites set about enriching themselves through the deprecation of the national patrimony. Sociologically, they were recycled from the administrative caste to the propertied class. I call this "the social reconversion of the stateocracy" (the

"nomenklatura," to use a more familiar but much less precise term of that Soviet state caste).

Russia's masters hoped to catch up with their Western counterparts. They were convinced that the West was going to let them into capitalist globalization as 'free and equal' partners. They had forgotten all that their grandparents made the revolution for in search of a solution to the problem of uneven capitalist development that was pushing the Russian Empire of the early 20th century to become a kind of colonized great power. They considered that the revolution of 1917 had been a historical accident and that with the USSR their country had departed from the 'civilization' to which they were now returning.

"Russia's masters hoped to be on par with their Western colleagues"

Moscow wanted to be New York, Paris or London, but what capitalist globalisation offered was Buenos Aires, São Paulo or Bombay: a subordinate and dependent status in which the 'Third Rome' (Moscow in the imperial ideology embraced in the sixteenth century) had to renounce its secular identity and reality as a great power, with its new bourgeoisie in the role of mere intermediary in the international trade of the raw materials of which it was subjected. Russia is number one in the world.

The 1990s were a time of enormous possibilities for private enrichment for the few, and of misery and demographic collapse for the many. Internationally, it was a time of humiliation and impotence with the enlargement of NATO and Western support for secessionism in Russia, while the Russian army was beaten in the Caucasus by several thousand Chechen guerrillas.

In a world with no respect for the weak, who would respect 'Russian interests' in the face of such a spectacle? In the 1990s, Russia's interests (actually those of the ruling elite) were to line their pockets through privatization. The pride and ambition of great power lagged behind the main thing: personal and group enrichment.

Once the social reconversion of the ruling caste had been successfully carried out, with Putin began the re-establishment of Russian power, and with it the clash with the really existing capitalism. The Russian elite fell off the horse and began to devise a plan to gain respect for the West that never quite understood Russia's internal processes or its realities. The first step was to subordinate the oligarchs to the authority of the state. In 2003 one of them, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, owner of the Yukos oil company, who wanted to bring American companies into the energy sector and boasted that by spending \$10 billion he could displace Putin from the presidency of the country, was arrested and imprisoned for ten years.

"Today, Russia's predatory elite is made up of political capitalists"

Today, Russia's predatory elite is made up of political capitalists, that is, a social group that derives its competitive advantage from the profits it derives from its control of the state. To do this, it needs global capital to recognize its private preserve in Russia and in its geographical environment. For example: the Russian energy sector is 'national' property controlled by Russia, i.e. by the owners of the Russian state. Russian oligarchs are subordinate objects of the state, as the Russian nobility was of the tsarist autocracy. (They're not worse, but they're different from their Western counterparts.)

In Russia's geographical environment, a domain, or at least a condominium, in which the interests of the Russian capitalist class are taken into account and respected by Western transnational capital must be recognized.

For the Western predatory elite, this is unacceptable. Their companies, to which governments are subordinate, do not admit any 'preserves'. Russia's natural resources must be opened up to the plunder of global capital and Russian political capitalists must become a mere comprador, subaltern and middleman class. But the Russian elite does not accept that role. And so the conflict ensues.

That is, if Western capital had had free access to control of Russia's energy and mineral resources, and if the Russian elite had settled for a subordinate role in that business and solicitous of foreign interests, there would have been no NATO enlargement, Russia would not have been excluded or Putin's regime demonized. whose well-known misdeeds and defects do not make it worse but much better than that of other "friendly" countries, such as Turkey or Saudi Arabia, and, of course, much less criminal in its international behavior than the Western powers that have caused more than four million deaths and 38 million displaced people in their wars and interventions after 9/11 in New York, according to the magnificent work *Cost of Wars* by Brown University in the United States.

So all this becomes very clear if it is read in the context of a conflict in which some are trying to have their 'gloeonomic' preserve recognized, what the Kremlin designates as "our legitimate interests", while others do not admit it because their preserve is the whole world and Russia and its environment cannot be an exception.

The most interesting thing about all of this is how does this conflict transform, how will it transform, how is it transforming, the Russian elite, the Russian Bonapartist regime, and Russian society as a whole?

The fight between Western transnational globalist capitalism and Russian political capitalism, as well as the refusal to treat the Russian elite as an equal in the global club of

predators, is pushing Moscow towards a certain 'Sovietization'; to change the social contract in domestic policy with more distribution, more state control, more Keynesianism and less market, and, certainly, with more repression. Externally, more emphasis is placed on anti-colonialism, anti-Westernism, enhancing the role of the BRIC's, relations with Africa, Latin America and of course Asia.

"The fight against Western transnational globalist capitalism is pushing Moscow towards a certain 'Sovietization'"

The result is as picturesque as watching President Putin, a staunch conservative, anti-communist and supporter of the market economy, praising Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and President Allende, in his [last speech to the Latin American forum](#) held in Moscow in September 2023. Or the [secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev](#), a KGB cadre, lashing out at "the Western colonial-imperialist project" and its "predatory civilization," and offering the world, especially the global south, Russia's "alternative way." This transformation is happening now and must be watched with the utmost attention.

All this may be quite disconcerting coming from characters as conservative and not very left-wing as the current Russian leaders, but in some ways that was the paradox of the USSR: an autocratic and tyrannical superpower in the political, conservative and traditionalist in many aspects, and at the same time, egalitarian and leveling in the social, and fundamental for its role as a counterweight to Western hegemonism in the world.

The Russia of today is not, nor will it be, the USSR of yesterday, but the logic of the struggle between capitalism subordinated to the state characteristic of Russia and Western transnational capitalism is giving rise to a transformation of great importance for the whole world.

Rafael Poch de Feliu, for La Pluma

Edited by [Maria Piedad Ossaba](#)

Source: [Rafael Poch de Feliu – Blog](#), February 23, 2024

Published by : [Context and Action \(CTXT\)](#), February 27, 2024

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La Pluma. Net 27.02.2024