

Patriotic Socialism and Unpatriotic Socialism



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For many decades, socialism was shown in the US as the worst thing that can exist on the planet. Thousands of capitalist propagandists have been repeating scary words about “horrors of communism”, “cultural Marxism” and “socialism destroying America” up to this day. In a last few years a group of people appeared in a political media space, who claim to combine the ideals of socialism with American patriotism, calling themselves “patriotic socialists”. In this article, we will examine who the individuals and groups promoting “patriotic socialism” are, what their political positions are, and whether patriotic socialism is compatible with Marxism-Leninism.

How Socialism Became “Unpatriotic” in the US

Capitalists have always been showing social-democrats and, later, communists, as betrayers of the nation, enemies of the people and simply those who want to establish chaos in the country. For decades, capitalist governments have propagated anti-communist ideology and sentiments amongst their citizens in a concerted effort to demonize and mischaracterize Marxism-Leninism. For example, Russian president Vladimir Putin openly labeled Bolsheviks as “national betrayers”, who allegedly received money from the German Empire to prevent Russia from winning in World War 1. In 2020, Donald Trump, the US president at that period, said: “Almost everywhere, socialism and communism, no matter where they are tested, lead to corruption and destruction. The thirst for the power of socialism leads to expansion, interference and oppression. All nations of the world must resist socialism and the misfortunes it entails”.

In the United States, following the October Revolution, during the period of Red Scare, McCarthyism and thereafter many false and unfounded accusations were made about socialism and the core ideological views of Marxism-Leninism as well. It should come as no surprise that as a result of this propaganda campaign, negative associations were formed in relation to communism. The widespread misconceptions that communism was inherently undemocratic, authoritarian, and inefficient were bolstered ideologically by the capitalists and their moneyed interests.

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One historical example was “The Committee on Un-American Activities”, which became a select committee in 1938 and was headed by Texas politician Martin Dies. The House Committee on Un-American Activities became a full standing committee in 1945 and was tasked with investigating the “(i) extent, character, and objects of un-American activities in the United States, (ii) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by the US constitution. During its tenure, the committee had more than 3,000 testimonies which were not benign for those accused of harboring ‘un-American’ (i.e. Communist) views. For example, as a result of the investigations of individuals between 1947-1951 more than 300 actors were blacklisted or were unable to work.



In addition, “think tanks” were founded with the intention of spreading capitalist propaganda with respect to the supposed unviability of socialism and the promotion of capitalist ideology. One of such institutions, the Foundation for Economic Education, was founded in 1946 to promote the values of “individual liberty, free-market economics, entrepreneurship, private property, high moral character, and limited government” and which is still operating in the same manner today as it was in 1946.

There are countless examples of organizations tasked explicitly with the purpose of promoting capitalist ideology which is inherently hostile to proletarian socialism. For example, PragerU - the infamous capitalist “think-tank” - had an estimated annual budget of \$50 million in 2021 of which 47% was targeted towards marketing as an “alternative to left wing ideology”. Such organizations and structures have worked tirelessly for decades in an effort to portray socialism as ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘un-American’. While the control of the capitalist class is so engrained in the United States, it is common for think-tanks and organizations to promote anti-communist ideology.

Is Socialism Really “Unpatriotic”?

As mentioned before, capitalists showed communists as people without national feelings. The American state brainwashed its citizens with tons of anti-communist content for decades. Communism was shown as the force that wants to destroy everything, to make Americans poor, to abolish democracy and establish a regime straight out of Orwell’s ‘1984’.

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But what are the real positions of the scientific socialism (i.e. Marxism-Leninism) on the questions of the state and the fatherland (homeland, or motherland)?

In the class society the state is an organ or instrument of violence exercised by one class against another.

“The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.” - Vladimir Lenin, “The State and Revolution”.

Its' purpose is to maintain the power of the ruling class and impose its will on the others, using different state institutions, such as courts, prisons, army, police, etc. Shortly speaking, the main goal of the capitalist state is to preserve the capitalist order, to defend capitalists and their interests and prevent the working people from taking power in the country.

Under capitalism, the state camouflages its' essence by equalizing the terms “state” and “homeland” and showing itself as the state of the whole people and for the people, while in reality it defends the interests of the significant minority of the population. The logic is quite simple: everyone who opposes the capitalists, opposes the state, and, therefore, opposes their homeland and wants to harm it.

The communists always uncover this false equation, because they want to make life in their countries better and they know the main reason of poverty, inequality, oppression, exploitation and other problems. They stand for the liberation of the working class - the majority of the nation - from economic exploitation, the thing that poisons the life of millions of people and makes it worse every day and every hour. This is why communists oppose the capitalist states as the main defenders of this way of things.

Capitalists know that, and they try their best to label communists as betrayers. However, this statement is far from reality. A good example of a communist's point of view on the capitalists and exploiters of their own nation can be seen in Lenin's “On the National Pride of the Great Russians”:

“...We love our language and our country, and we are doing our very utmost to raise her toiling masses (i.e., nine-tenths of her population) to the level of a democratic and socialist consciousness. To us it is most painful to see and feel the outrages, the oppression and the humiliation our fair country suffers at the hands of the tsar's butchers, the nobles and the capitalists...

We are full of national pride because the Great-Russian nation, too, has created a revolutionary class, because it, too, has proved capable of providing mankind with great models of the struggle for freedom and socialism, and not only with great pogroms, rows of gallows, dungeons, great famines and great servility to priests, tsars, landowners and capitalists...

We are full of a sense of national pride, and for that very reason we particularly hate our slavish past (when the landed nobility led the peasants into war to stifle the freedom of Hungary, Poland, Persia and China), and our slavish present, when these selfsame landed proprietors, aided by the capitalists, are loading us into a war... Nobody is to be blamed for being born a slave; but a slave who not only eschews a striving for freedom but justifies and eulogises his slavery (e.g., calls the throttling of Poland and the Ukraine, etc., a “defence of the fatherland” of the Great Russians) — such a slave is a lickspittle and a boor, who arouses a legitimate feeling of indignation, contempt, and loathing.

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“No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations,” said Marx and Engels, the greatest representatives of consistent nineteenth century democracy, who became the teachers of the revolutionary proletariat. And, full of a sense of national pride, we Great-Russian workers want, come what may, a free and independent, a democratic, republican and proud Great Russia, one that will base its relations with

its neighbours on the human principle of equality, and not on the feudalist principle of privilege, which is so degrading to a great nation”.

The most important thing is Lenin’s conclusion: “it is impossible... to “defend the fatherland” otherwise than by using every revolutionary means to combat the monarchy, the landowners and the capitalists of one’s own fatherland, i.e., the worst enemies of our country. We say that the Great Russians cannot “defend the fatherland” otherwise than by desiring the defeat of tsarism in any war, this as the lesser evil to nine-tenths of the inhabitants of Great Russia. For tsarism not only oppresses those nine-tenths economically and politically, but also demoralises, degrades, dishonours and prostitutes them by teaching them to oppress other nations and to cover up this shame with hypocritical and quasi-patriotic phrases...”

As can be seen, Lenin makes a clear distinction between the state and the nation, the state and the people living in it. The communists use every opportunity to show that the state is not an arbitrary between the labor and the capital. It’s on the capitalist side by its’ nature.

Are there any historical examples of communists improving the life of the nation? Did the communists really improve the life of the people after a successful socialist revolution? This is the thing that all the capitalist propagandists try to hide. History proves this to be the case.

The October Revolution allowed millions of Russian workers and peasants to enjoy numerous social benefits, such as free housing, healthcare and education. For the first time in centuries the majority of the Russian population managed to get in contact with the famous Russian poets, writers and artists, and other nationalities had their national cultures established.

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But the most important achievement of the revolution was the power of capital being overthrown. In the Soviet state the people had a right to get a job, and they didn’t meet national or racial oppression. They were the ones to produce and own the goods produced. When the Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, millions of the Soviet citizens knew what they were fighting for. Finally, it was the Soviet power who made it possible for the son of Russian peasant – Yuri Gagarin – to become the first human in space. All of this happened because the Bolshevik party struggled hard against the tsarist Russian government and the Russian capitalists, because it carried out the real patriotism – the love towards their country and their people and strong will to improve the life here and move towards socialism.

With respect to the question of the fatherland, it is necessary to make a distinction between one’s homeland and the state. In Russia, the Bolsheviks showed their patriotism by struggling hard against the Russian state in order to secure the future of the Russian people, as well, as other nations, leading to the creation of the Soviet Union, and they were the real patriots of their country.

Otherwise, it is possible to opportunistically hide in the support for the homeland the support of the capitalist state which entails the class domination of the bourgeoisie over the workers.

The “Patriotic Socialism”

We uncovered the “unpatriotic” socialism (Marxism-Leninism) and its fake “unpatrioticness”. So, what do the “patriotic socialists” offer? The question must be raised as to whether patriotic socialism is consistent with Marxism-Leninism or is simply a revision of Marxism-Leninism which tries to intertwine Marxism with

bourgeois nationalism.

Some of the main figures representing the trend of “patriotic socialism” in modern discourse are Caleb Maupin of Center for Political Innovation (CPI), Jackson Hinkle, Haz, and Peter Coffin. The main argument put forth by adherents to this trend is that there is no contradiction between being an anti-imperialist communist and simultaneously being “patriots who possess a love of country and people”.

It is claimed that the failure of the American left is due, at least in part, to the alienation caused by the Communists failing to incorporate nationalistic rhetoric, posturing, and tendencies which are prevalent in capitalist countries, such as the U.S. From this standpoint, it is argued that various other political trends such as anarchism, liberalism, etc., are infantile “western” ideologies which do not embrace patriotic socialism, and that patriotic socialist ideology is widespread in regions outside the West due to their supposedly advanced relative theoretical development.

The implication is that the failure of these ideologies to incorporate patriotism within their theoretical platforms and in practice is the cause of their deficiencies and that “patriotic socialism” would be an effective tactic to grow the Communist movement within the U.S. by appealing to workers with nationalist sympathies.

However, what does embodying and practicing “patriotic socialism” mean in practice when the U.S. and other countries around the world are governed by the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie? And what concrete methods are the figureheads promoting this ideology and worldview proposing to achieve proletarian socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat?

While aligning themselves with the radical left, it becomes apparent that the proponents of this theory do not truly propose any sort of revolutionary ideology. For example, in describing ‘proletarian patriotism’, Jackson Hinkle stated that,

“Socialism is not about tearing this country down or anything like that. Socialism is about using the mechanisms that we have in this country to build a twenty-first century socialism that is based on a history of American progressivism that will actually help this country.”

The obvious problem here is that the existing “mechanisms” which exist within the United States, the capitalist state, are controlled by the bourgeoisie and serve as their class organs. By using the anti-communist posturing that socialism is a radical and destructive force aimed at “tearing the country down”, a more sensible tactic is proposed which implies using the existing mechanisms of society as opposed to any radical, revolutionary alternative.

Four Theses on American Patriotism

Again, the state is a manifestation of class antagonisms and only exists on the basis of these class antagonisms. Under capitalism, the bourgeoisie owns the means of production privately and use the state as a means to protect and enforce their collective class interests and suppress the working class opposition.

In the United States, the two main political parties are the Republicans and the Democrats which exist as two-sides of the bourgeois coin, giving Americans only the choice of this or that bourgeois electee. So this high-sounding language about helping the country using the existing mechanisms of the state is just reformism draped in revolutionary language.

These proponents and their adherents essentially accept bourgeois propaganda at face value and only use their platforms for spreading opportunism and

social-chauvinism which is clearly not a productive activity in achieving socialism.

“There is the America of George W. Bush and Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Yes, that America exists. But there is also the America of John Brown and Harriet Tubman. There is also the America of the people who built the labor movement, and fought for the rights of women, and fought for the rights of the LGBT community. At the same time that slavery was going on, there were people rising up and protesting against it...we have just as much of a right to call ourselves Americans as they do. And it is a huge mistake for us to hand over the identity of what it means to be an American to the imperialists and the warmakers.” - Caleb Maupin stated.

The aforementioned quote underscores that the “patriotic socialists” place great emphasis on reclaiming national identity based on the legacy of some relatively progressive elements in the national history. However, what are the specific policy proposals that Maupin and his now defunct Center for Political Innovation called for in their four-point plan? The mass mobilization to rebuild the country, nationalization of natural resources, public control of banking, and an economic bill of rights. The group proposes that the existing U.S. constitution be amended to afford the right to a job, education, housing and healthcare. In order to achieve these ends is a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party necessary to abolish capitalist exploitation and lay the groundwork for socialist construction on a national and international basis?

“The Center for Political Innovation is not a new Marxist party. Democratic Centralism in the United States has resulted in creating a number of irrelevant sects, none of which can truly call themselves a “party” in the sense of any force worthy of the label. The Center for Political Innovation does not seek to become the new “vanguard” or “leader of the movement.” Rather, the Center for Political Innovation is an educational project aiming to get out of the movement and to the masses.

The goals are two-fold:

To propose a series of economic and political reforms that would challenge corporate power, and force those who support these demands into confrontation with the profit-centered economic system and its global dominance.

To teach genuine, constructive, anti-imperialist, optimistic, scientific socialism to all who want to learn it, facilitating debate and discussion among serious, professional worker-politicians about the concepts and ideology that can lead beyond capitalism and imperialism.”

Maupin then goes on to praise “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, Baathism, Bolivarianism, etc. - deviations from Marxism or petty-bourgeois “socialism”. Needless to say, this is tantamount to rhetorically decrying the exploitation of capitalism while at the same time rejecting the dictatorship of the proletariat in favor of bourgeois reformism.

The evidence for such a claim that the ‘patriotic socialists’ are opportunists and their departure from Marxism-Leninism is clearly defined within their own political platforms. For example, the now Center for Political Innovation (CPI) stated that their objective is to establish “the foundations of a new and dynamic American Socialism, for the benefit of people both at home and abroad.”



How did the organization say that it will go about achieving this objective? While the platform spoke of creating an “international framework of multilateral order and prosperity” there is only high-sounding language about creating peace, prosperity and justice. While the organization gives idealist language about this hypothetical future of peace and prosperity under a ‘multilateral order’ of socialism, it falls back on petty reformism in the actual proposals.

In fact, CPI founder Caleb Maupin stated, “Let’s be clear. There is room for private businesses in a socialist society. The idea that everything must be run by the state is not practical”. While simultaneously acknowledging that capitalism is a system of production for profit, Maupin sees no contradiction in having privately-owned businesses under socialism which entails production for profit. As such, the organization provides support for states which are supposedly socialist in character while also allowing private production and profit. Thus, the ‘socialism’ of the ‘patriotic socialists’ is not socialism at all.

Such revisions of Marxism-Leninism are not uncommon and can be traced back to the Communist Manifesto itself in which Marx and Engels describe so-called ‘bourgeois socialism’:

“A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind. This form of socialism has, moreover, been worked out into complete systems.... The Socialistic bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society, minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The bourgeoisie naturally conceives the world in which it is supreme to be the best; and bourgeois Socialism develops this comfortable conception into various more or less complete systems.”

Thus it is obvious that even during the time of Marx and Engels there were so-called socialists who conceived of socialism with a bourgeois coloring and are devoid of its revolutionary elements. This can be derived from the fact that in the same Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels were consistent when they clearly stated that "In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, [Communists] point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality".

Given what was previously stated by Marx and Engels, it should be clear that they did not take the position of the so-called 'patriotic socialists' who make nationalism a focal point in their orientation. By 'unpatriotic', these groups are simply attacking Marxism-Leninism which is devoid of their nationalistic emphasis.

“Left-Flavored” Bourgeois Patriotism

There always are and will be individuals and groups within the communist movement who attempt to revise and distort Marxism-Leninism in such a way that is beneficial to the ruling class. How would the views of the patriotic socialists be beneficial to the interests of the capitalist class?

Patriotism, without reference to the state of a nation, amounts to little more than bourgeois nationalism. In his work *Marxism and the National Question*, Joseph Stalin said of nationalism:

“The wave of nationalism swept onwards with increasing force, threatening to engulf the mass of the workers. And the more the movement for emancipation declined, the more plentifully nationalism pushed forth its blossoms.

At this difficult time Social-Democracy had a high mission – to resist nationalism and to protect the masses from the general "epidemic." For Social-Democracy, and Social-Democracy alone, could do this, by countering nationalism with the tried weapon of internationalism, with the unity and indivisibility of the class struggle".

It is beneficial in that the class struggle can be re-interpreted as a national struggle without sufficient emphasis on the expropriation of the bourgeois class and the abolition of capital.

The #MAGACOMMUNISM movement in the U.S. and similar movements elsewhere attempt nothing more than to align Marxism-Leninism with an outwardly reactionary bourgeois political movement and funnel working class efforts in a way which is unharmed to the bourgeoisie, as they themselves control the modern political and economic apparatus. Based on the description given by Marx and Engels it is clear that the 'patriotic socialists' are attempting to distort Marxism-Leninism as their understanding is in no way consistent with Marxism-Leninism as it pertains to the national struggles of the proletarians of different countries.

The criticisms made by the 'patriotic socialists' against their political opponents is rightly centered on the fact that existing communist parties and organizations have been marginal and unsuccessful for decades. It is easy for them to make this critique against organizations such as the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) in the United States, for example, which has taken an openly revisionist position in calling for an "all-people's coalition" which essentially funnels political support towards the Democratic Party.

While rightly pointing out some of the problems of communists working in USA and the CPUSA in particular, the "patriotic socialists" are actually trying to create a platform for...another opportunist organization in the United States. The current

CPUSA is an organization closer to the Democratic Party. The “patriotic socialists”, on the other hand, essentially want the same CPUSA, only rhetorically closer to the Republican Party.

And as such it should come as no surprise that the representatives of this trend are closely aligned with the forces of reaction and spreading misinformation while claiming to be allies of the majority of workers. Such figures commonly appropriate the language of the far-right with their calls against “globalists” and “liberal elites” in an effort to re-brand proletarian internationalism as compatible with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism.

While rhetorically acknowledging the deficiencies of capitalism and claiming to be socialists, these representatives are in actuality fomenting feelings of bourgeois nationalism and chauvinism by focusing on the “progressive” elements of nationalism. Whereas the CPUSA is a right-wing deviation that works to orient workers towards the Democratic Party, the patriotic socialists do the exact same thing but towards the Republican Party.

However, the average American worker and farmer remains indifferent to “patriotic socialism”, and the capitalist doesn't need them as well. The American capitalist is strong without these “patriotic socialists”: they willingly fund liberal and conservative media and create institutions to openly defend bourgeois ideology. We have already mentioned some of these “think-tanks”.

But in other countries, where contradictions are more acute, capitalists use those people. In Russia, for example, such pseudo-communists are strong. They are supported by the government, openly financed from the state budget, and have capitalists and federal agents in their ranks. In Germany, the SPD and Die Linke are the examples, SYRIZA – in Greece, and so on.

Finally, the organizations promoting patriotic socialism have faced controversy and concerning allegations against their behavior. For example, the Center for Political Innovation was embroiled in controversy after allegations of “abusive and inappropriate sexual behavior” were brought by the groups own members against Caleb Maupin. It is also of note that as events escalated in Ukraine, the Center for Political Innovation was quick to elicit support for the so-called “People’s Republics” and put their nationalist orientation on full display. While delivering phrases about supporting peace and prosperity, the social chauvinists openly supported Russian Imperialism.



There are many historical examples of socialist countries enacting policies demonstrate why it does not make sense to speak of 'unpatriotic socialism'. For example, the Soviet Constitution affording equal rights to all citizens while at the same time providing free education, healthcare, the right to a job, etc. The Soviet Union developed national schools, national theatres and educational institutions to raise the cultural level of the masses.

These policies, along with others such as the targeted reduction in illiteracy, were clearly beneficial to the nation and were instrumental in developing the nation. At the same time, Marxism-Leninism is consistent with proletarian internationalism which supports the workers of all countries in the struggle against capitalist exploitation. Therefore, there is no necessary split between "patriotic" and "unpatriotic", but rather a split between the bourgeois/petty bourgeois nationalist distorters of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism.

Conclusion

There is no problem with attempts to avenge the denigration of the communist movement. However, the methods and ideological underpinning of the "patriotic socialist" movement will not be successful in achieving this task. In misunderstanding the role of the state the "patriotic socialists" ultimately end up defending capitalist states and not their homeland. This is because patriotism has a class dimension under capitalism. The capitalists exploit these feelings to further their own class interests. In order to avoid the historical errors committed by the Second International and other betrayals of socialism, it is necessary that we do not make the same mistakes in fighting for the interests of bourgeois states.

Thus, the movement for patriotic socialism can be seen as nothing more than a marketing campaign for the forces of reaction to mislead the workers and create and foster an environment under which the dictatorship of capital continues to reign and to funnel workers' movement into unproductive activities.

Working class patriotism and internationalism is the only true patriotism as it educates workers on the basis of national equality and the struggle against chauvinism and class privilege. The only way to truly fight for freedom is through

opposition to, and not the support of, the bourgeois state which protects the interests of the capitalist class and maintains their class dictatorship.

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