

# The International Socialist Organization and the CIA-led anti-Russia campaign

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For the past month, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US has been silent on the raging conflict between the Trump White House and the intelligence agencies over alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election. Day after day, Trump and his opponents in the CIA and their allies—the bulk of the corporate media and the Democratic Party—have traded blows on a critical question of imperialist foreign policy: Washington’s posture toward Moscow.

The Democratic Party, sections of the Republican Party and the corporate media, in close coordination with US intelligence agencies, have been engaged in a systematic campaign to hijack popular opposition in order to promote aggression against Russia. The pages of the *New York Times* and other publications have for months been filled with unsubstantiated charges of Russian “hacking” of the elections and denunciations of Trump as a “poodle” of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Yet the ISO and its web site, [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org), have studiously ignored what is undoubtedly the most profound crisis of the American ruling class since Watergate.

The virtual silence of the ISO on this matter is explained by the fact that the organization, as with similar groups like Socialist Alternative, functions as a faction of the Democratic Party. On foreign policy, the ISO has long lined up with that faction of the ruling class and CIA that has demanded more aggressive action in Syria and against Russia. Rather than revealing its positions openly, it has chosen to keep silent and tacitly support the media-driven, anti-Russia campaign.

What little the ISO has published on the subject since the election of Trump in November confirms this analysis.

For a period of over two months, from Election Day (November 8) to January 11, *Socialist Worker* did not produce a single article on the issue of “Russian hacking,” which was dominating the media at the time. This same period saw the rout of US-led proxy forces in Syria—which the ISO has promoted as “revolutionaries”—culminating in the fall of Aleppo. The Obama administration responded by

expelling 35 Russian diplomats, followed by a new round of sanctions against the country.

It was not until January 11 that *Socialist Worker* published its first article that even addressed the subject, and this was written by a reader of the web site, not a staff writer. The piece, “Cynical uses of the hacking allegations,” casts doubt on the claims made by the intelligence agencies, without saying anything about the motivations behind them. The accusations “come off as yet another desperate, pathetic attempt by the Democratic Party to blame anyone and everyone for its electoral loss—anyone, that is, except for...you know, the party itself.”

After making this statement, directed at criticism over the tactics of the Democratic Party, the writer goes on to state, “The allegations of Russian hacking are indeed quite serious and absolutely warrant further investigation.” However, there should not, he concludes, be a “rush to judgment.”

On January 17, in “Looking for villains everywhere but in the mirror,” *International Socialist Review* editor Lance Selfa, stepped in to assure its allies in the Democratic Party that it is quite willing to “rush to judgment.” “It’s quite possible—even likely—that the Russian state would try to influence the US election if it was able to.” However, if the allegations are true, Selfa adds, “what Russia did to win the election for Trump mattered far less than what Clinton and the Democratic Party did to lose it.”

In this more or less official response by the leadership, the ISO abandons any substantive challenge to the claims of US intelligence. The author gives backhanded credence to the witch-hunt against Trump while conveniently saying nothing about the lack of evidence presented by the intelligence agencies.

A day later, on January 18, in an article titled “Do American spies have the goods on Russia?” *Socialist Worker* writer Mukund Rathi takes things a step further, writing, “I would be surprised if Russia—a major imperialist power in competition with the US—had no involvement whatsoever in the hacking of Democratic Party e-mail accounts, with the aim of embarrassing a political rival, if

not swaying the whole presidential election.” While stating that “we should protest when scaremongering about Russian cyber-spies is used for the purposes of US imperialism,” Rathi insists that this “doesn’t mean we can’t acknowledge that Russia is also an imperialist power, capable of intervening in elections, US and otherwise.”

Beneath the surface of this plague-on-both-your-houses position, the ISO lends credibility to the faction of the intelligence apparatus spearheading the campaign for war with Russia.

The last article that addressed the subject appeared January 20. In a piece titled “It’s up to us to resist Trump,” the ISO lines up directly behind the Democratic Party and the military-intelligence apparatus one last time:

“Dozens of Congressional Democrats have said they will boycott the inauguration after Trump belittled Georgia Rep. and civil rights movement hero John Lewis for calling Trump an ‘illegitimate president’ because of allegations of Russian interference in the election.

“It’s nice to see our country’s official opposition party actually engaging in some opposition [!] after most Democrats spent the first weeks after the election pledging to find ways to collaborate with Trump. But let’s be clear that whatever the Russians did or didn’t do is a drop in the ocean compared to the many more important reasons why we need to oppose Trump.”

The fact that the article’s author categorizes the right-wing, anti-Russian campaign as “engaging in some opposition” rather than as an internecine struggle within the state between two reactionary camps of US imperialism reveals the political role of the ISO as a “left” cover for but one faction of the ruling class.

Since January 20, the only comment appearing on the ISO’s web site on the subject is a brief, two-paragraph letter from a reader, posted on February 16. Framed as a response to the January 11 article, the reader asserts that “Russia deserves more scrutiny,” admonishing *Socialist Worker* for being too reserved in accepting “the seriousness and likely truth” of the hacking charges!

In all of these articles, there is no examination of the actual class interests behind the anti-Russia campaign or examination of the implications of the Democratic Party’s call for aggression.

The anti-Russian campaign is an indication of the deep crisis taking place within the American ruling class. A growing rift over the strategy of US imperialism has placed, at least for the time being, a significant section of the political establishment and military-intelligence apparatus against the Trump administration, namely over accusations that Trump is “too soft” on Putin. Some of its most visible political figures include Republican Senator Lindsey

Graham and “left” Democrat Senator Elizabeth Warren.

The politics of the ISO align with the interests of this rival section of the political establishment and intelligence agencies. It is for this reason that *Socialist Worker* has said so little on the subject. Any too candid a statement would reveal their support of US imperialism in its already advanced preparations for war with Russia.

Over the past five years, the ISO has been one of the main cheerleaders of the bloody US-backed proxy war in Syria. *Socialist Worker* has peddled article after article presenting a false narrative that the CIA-backed “rebels” constitute “democratic” forces in a revolutionary struggle against the bourgeois regime of Bashar Al-Assad and his principal ally, Russia. (See, “The International Socialist Organization and the fall of Aleppo”)

This is nothing new. The entire political orientation of the ISO ultimately finds its origins in the late Max Shachtman, an ex-member of the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) who repudiated Trotskyism in 1939 when he characterized the USSR as an imperialist power.

Shachtman’s theoretical break from Marxist politics consisted of an appraisal of the Soviet bureaucracy as a “new ruling class” and that imperialism and Stalinism should be opposed equally. This political line, associated with conceptions such as “bureaucratic collectivism,” represented the abandonment of any defense of the Soviet Union despite its encirclement by the imperialist powers.

Shachtman went on to play a counterrevolutionary role. Infamously, he supported the US imperialist intervention into Korea in the 1950s. Leaflets prepared by the Shachtmanites were airdropped to Chinese and North Korean soldiers, urging them on the basis of “socialist” arguments to surrender to the American invaders. Shachtman himself, after abandoning revolutionary socialist politics altogether, became a vocal supporter of the imperialist war in Vietnam and loyal advisor to AFL-CIO President George Meany.

The ISO’s hue and cry over “imperialist” Russia is in keeping with its Shachtmanite origins. Organizations like the ISO represent privileged sections of the upper middle class whose interests align with those of US imperialism.

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