

Russian Stalinists, pseudo-left close ranks against opposition to pension cuts

By Clara Weiss
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Last month, Moscow announced a pension-cutting bill raising the retirement age for women and men by eight and five years to 65 and 63, respectively. This organized theft of funds that Russian workers have paid into the state pension fund over their entire working lives is the Kremlin's most unpopular measure since Vladimir Putin first became president in 2000. Over 90 percent of the Russian population oppose the reform.

The pension cut is the Kremlin's response to a deepening budget crisis, triggered above all by the NATO powers' financial sanctions after their 2014 regime change operation brought down a pro-Moscow regime in Ukraine. Putin, who has promised since 2005 not to raise the retirement age, is plummeting in the polls. The Russian business oligarchy fears that this drastic assault on living standards will provoke open social struggles.

So far, protests held on July 1, July 12 and July 18 have attracted only a few thousand people, a pale reflection of the overwhelming popular opposition to the pension cuts. This is due not only to the banning of all public protests in cities where World Cup football matches were held, but above all to the reactionary, anti-worker politics of the protest organizers.

Workers in Russia face the aftereffects of the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. These include not only the NATO war drive in Europe, but the Kremlin's plans to resume the looting of the working class that followed the restoration of capitalism in the 1990s. The way forward is to mobilize the opposition among workers in Russia, unifying it with growing strikes and protests in Europe against war and austerity, into an international movement of the working class fighting on a revolutionary socialist program.

Against such a perspective, a disparate alliance of

opposition parties and trade unions has emerged, rallying virtually the entire political establishment apart from the ruling United Russia. This alliance of parties based of the affluent middle class is founded on a common acceptance of the restoration of capitalism in Russia, and vicious hostility to a movement in the working class. It aims to strangle mass opposition by steering it into right-wing, nationalist channels.

In most cities, the main organizational push for the protests came from Alexei Navalny's supporters. The son of a couple of ex-bureaucrats who enriched themselves during capitalist restoration, Navalny holds far-right views. Celebrated in the Western press as a "democrat", he has repeatedly participated in the neo-fascist Russian Marches and described people from the Caucasus as "cockroaches" who deserve death. For over a decade, he has maintained extensive ties to leading Russian oligarchs and to US imperialism's "color revolution" machinery.

Navalny speaks for a section of the oligarchy and upper middle-class that sees the Putin regime as an obstacle to their personal enrichment. His attempts to manipulate growing social discontent within the working class are aimed at directing opposition to Putin into right-wing channels that would set the stage for a color-revolution style coup in Russia.

Zhirinovsky's fascistic Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) has collaborated with Putin and United Russia for almost two decades now. Its unabashed promotion of far-right nationalism, anti-Semitism and racism, ever since the LDPR's rise in the 1990s, represents a conscious attempt to direct social discontent in the working class into the most reactionary channels.

With far-right and pro-imperialist forces dominating the protests, Russian Stalinist and pseudo-left organizations—Boris Kagarlitsky's *Rabkor.ru* web site,

the Pabloites of the Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), and Daria Mitina's United Communist Party (OKP)—play a critical role in providing this “opposition“ to the Kremlin with a thin “left” cover.

In collaboration with the Stalinist KPRF, which maintains close ties to various far-right groups and to the Kremlin, as well as “Just Russia” and the “Civic Solidarity” group, they have formed the “People against the increase of the retirement age” coalition (*Narod protiv povysheniia pensionogo vozrasta*), or “Narod Protiv” (“People Against”) for short.

The barely disguised purpose of this alliance is to derail and disorient popular opposition, so the pension cuts can pass. While Narod Protiv calls on protesters to issue impotent appeals to Duma deputies not to approve the cuts, it admits that the Duma will approve the bill anyway.

An article on the *Rabkor.ru* web site, “The Pension Reform and Resistance,” states: “Of course, they will ultimately not vote in the way that the voters want them to and not even in the way that themselves want to, but how they are being told to vote by their bosses [i.e., the Kremlin]. However, this conflict must be clear, open, evident, painful and growing with each day.”

The article concludes that opponents of the pension cuts must continue to resist, but *Rabkor.ru* wants this resistance to be tied to a perspective that is doomed to defeat. In fact, many of the forces involved in the protests, including the LDPR, the trade unions in the Confederation of Labor (KTR), and the KPRF, have provided critical support to the Putin regime for decades.

This perspective goes hand in hand with an “anything goes” orientation to allying with all forces, including pro-imperialist and fascistic groups, that claim to oppose the pension cuts. A July 13 OKP statement declares, “The task of opposing the predatory pseudo-reform allows the communists and their allies to consider all citizens, all social and political organizations as fellow-travelers which oppose the predatory plans of the government. We must initiate our own and participate in all other activities that are directed against the realization of these plans.”

The OKP's potential “fellow travelers” include both Navalny and the fascistic LDPR, with whose policies the OKP has only superficial differences. After decades of carrying out explicitly pro-capitalist politics,

Stalinist and pseudo-left groups see alliances with fascistic forces as natural and a matter of course.

The tendencies inside Narod Protiv have wildly contradictory foreign policy orientations, and many do not hide their sympathies with and ties to imperialism. Navalny and the RSM have lined up behind US provocations against Russia, whereas the OKP and KPRF back Putin's foreign policy. All these tendencies, however, are closing ranks to back the most drastic assault on workers' living standards since the capitalist shock therapy of the 1990s.

The role of fascistic forces inside and around Narod Protiv constitute a warning to the working class. The Stalinists' support for fascists is the outcome of a protracted nationalist degeneration—that stems from Stalin's genocidal purge of the Marxists inside the Soviet Union, who were led after the death of Vladimir Lenin by Leon Trotsky, and that was consummated in capitalist restoration. As in the 20th century and the fascist-led regime change operation backed by NATO in Ukraine in 2014, the fascists and their allies will prove violently hostile to the workers.

To lead the struggle against this, and give the rapidly developing opposition to the Putin regime a progressive, socialist direction, the central question is to rebuild a Marxist political leadership of the working class in Russia and internationally. This means building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Russia, the only tendency that represents the heritage of the Russian Revolution and Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism.

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