

The Beautiful Appearance of the

Nation

and Its Dark Shadow

Wage labor, nation and war

The national liberation of Ukraine, the fundamental threat to Russian sovereignty, the defense of a rule-based order of values are the fighting terms used to justify the slaughter in Ukraine, the aggravated social conditions for ordinary people in industrialized countries, the increased hunger and starvation in the so-called Third World. One might assume that the ordinary citizen, who daily has to submit to the unpleasant conditions of wage labor, who often does not know how to pay the rising bills and rents, who increasingly faces the prospect of a materially and emotionally endangered life in old age, reacts at least with incomprehension to the call of the rulers and their press to embrace the problems of domination, the overcoming of which is at his or her own expense.

But the opposite is usually the case. As if the people and the leadership were of one piece, the discussions on the government floor are mirrored one-to-one at the lower levels of society: tank deliveries yes, fighter jets rather not, or is it?

Defense minister too wimpy, war minister swell! Is the chancellor a cunctator or just level-headed? Risk nuclear war? Is Putin crazy or evil? - are the questions and statements that move the people and the leadership.

On August 28, Bild am Sonntag quoted Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock as saying, "For me, it is clear: Ukraine is also defending our freedom, our peace order, and we will support it financially and militarily, and for as long as it is necessary. Period."

"Our freedom?" Whose freedom does Ms. Baerbock mean? If she means Germany's freedom of state action vis-à-vis the world, she is certainly right. But "our freedom?" Every action of the private individual in civil society is free as long as it is within the bounds of what is permitted. If the limits are exceeded in this respect, the monopolist of force restricts or prevents any freedom. This is a restriction of freedom that a state would never allow itself in interstate traffic.

National Security Council Communications Director (U.S. War Department spokesman) John Kirby explained the tank deliveries to Ukraine on Jan. 25, 2023: "These tanks are to help Ukraine fight effectively in open terrain to defend its sovereignty and territory and to retake territory taken by the Russians." (Stuttgarter Zeitung - online - dated Jan. 26, 2023)

"Defend sovereignty and territory and recapture territories"? Who has the benefit here, who the damage? Of course, it is the aspiration of every state to enjoy unrestricted rule over its territory including its people and to exploit the sources of wealth. To this end, any use of force is acceptable. Conversely, the question is not so easy to answer. The fact that in so-called rogue states private individuals enrich themselves illegally as oligarchs from the national wealth is

quite familiar to the educated people of the free West. What is less well known is that in our countries, too, the income of the rich is based on the work of the poorer parts of the population.

The fact that the range between poverty and wealth is constantly widening is whistled from the rooftop, but is not recognized as an economic necessity in this system, but is merely perceived as an injustice. For those segments of the population that depend on their own labor for subsistence, the harm is more likely to come to the fore when benefits and harms are weighed in defense of sovereignty and territory. For it is not their sovereignty, not their territory, that they are defending. In the calculation of their state in the event of war, they appear at most as useful cannon fodder.

When the Russian government speaks of a "fundamental threat" to Russian sovereignty (Putin's declaration of war of February 24, 2023), it is certainly right. NATO's embrace of Russia is no different. But is this also the problem of the vast majority of the Russian population? Is not much more decisive for them the drastic economic war measures by the NATO countries and their allies? Is not the mobilization of millions of young Russians for war a traumatic experience for their parents, siblings, lovers and the people themselves? And last but not least, the threat from the American side to strike a devastating blow in case of nuclear escalation on the part of the Russians!

Conclusion

To stand up for the national interests of one's country is a mistake if one belongs to those who participate in the production of wealth through the sale and use of their labor power. There is, however, another side which can expect advantages from a successful struggle. A unity of the two sections in capitalist society, as demanded by the agitation sections in all states, should not exist from the point of view of the wage-workers.

At the beginning of March 2023, under the title "Der schöne Schein der Nation und ihr dunkler Schatten," Volume I, an annotated new edition of Otto Bauer's paper "Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie", published in 1907 by the Viennese Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand, will be published. In a second volume follows a discussion of Otto Bauer's theses on the positive significance of the nation for the proletariat. Participants in the discussion are Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, Josef Strasser, Josef Stalin, V. I. Lenin. The reprint of the excellent contribution to the discussion by Anton Pannekoek under the title of "Klassenkampf und Nation" [Class Struggle and Nation] (1912) is available from Red & Black Books Hamburg 2022, ISBN 978-3-9823797-8-4.

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