

“Putin’s Quandary: Paying the Piper for Collusion with International Capitalism”

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Over the last 14 years, the foreign policies of post-Soviet Russia (whose elites have created a sort of capitalist system, although there is a plethora of opinions on precisely what type of system it has), and especially of its leader, Vladimir Putin, have been characterized as inimical to “Western interests”—so much so that the current fevered demonization has for Western officials (and scholars) become practically an afterthought. But it was not always so; until 2003-4, Putin (and his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin) conducted a policy of collusion with the West that could be described as nothing less than obsequious. Russia’s policies, in other words, have been widely misunderstood—even on the left.

In this vein, it is universally held—even among left analysts—that post-Soviet Russia has, for example, always “opposed” NATO and its eastward expansion up to Russia’s borders; but the evidence shows that far from opposing, Russia’s leaders colluded with expansion. If Western analysts have failed to see this truth, it is because their failure to apply a Marxist framework of analysis has made them incapable of uncovering the fetishistic essence of Russian policy that underlies its appearance. Indeed, it is argued here that Russia’s policies can be understood only within the framework of the relations of international capitalism and of Russia’s place within that system. At least until 2003 or so (and including the first years of Putin’s tenure), a sort of cabal existed between the leaders of Russia and the capitalist countries which sought to perpetuate a “grand deception,” such that Russia would appear to “resist” the West’s (transparent) attempts to defang its once-powerful military and to impoverish its people; all the while, Western elites, with a wink and a nod, played along, cognizant all the while of Moscow’s treachery towards its own people. Russia’s fledgling capitalists have acquiesced to the capitalist West because they know that now, unlike during Soviet times, they can earn gargantuan profits from the sale of above all Russia’s fossil fuels and minerals. In their eagerness to do so, they have sold out the strategic and other interests of their people. They also display traits of their pre-revolutionary capitalist forebears—avarice, short-term profit seeking, lack of concern for the masses, etc.

These machinations of international capitalism had, it is argued here, two interrelated objectives: to prevent a Russian *revanche*, to insure that post-Soviet Russia, once the center of the world socialist system, would never again rear the ugly head of socialism, and to seize and exploit the vast resources—natural and human—possessed by the Russia and the former Soviet states.

One element that significantly helps us put into perspective capitalism’s hostility to post-Soviet Russia’s foreign policy is reference to the “Claude Rains” syndrome, namely, that the West’s “shock that Russia is acting aggressively” (by its support and recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, its annexation of the territory of Crimea which historically was Russian, etc.) becomes almost laughable in the light of the fact that it is in the very *nature* of international imperialism, as articulated by Lenin and others, to commit countless acts of barbarism (Vietnam, Iraq, Palestine, Chile, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Congo, Indonesia and East Timor, etc.) against the peoples of the world. Indeed, the Kremlin’s actions described as “aggressive” in the West have really been defensive, employed in a desperate attempt to shore up Moscow’s positions weakened by an aggressive international capitalism (and which Russia’s elites themselves long supported).

