

The Events in Kazakhstan and the Question of Imperialism in the International Communist Movement

Statement Jan 26, 2022

Within a few days, and at a rapid pace, workers' protests developed in Kazakhstan in early January and led to the resignation of the Kazakh government on January 05. The protests escalated on the same day in a fashion opaque to international observers, and with the participation of various forces. On 06 January, the deployment of the troops of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) took place, to be subsequently followed by their withdrawal on 19 January.

Within this short period of time, a series of statements by different parties and organizations of the International Communist Movement (ICM) emerged. Some of the positions taken differed widely, and the dispute over the events in Kazakhstan quickly took the form of a struggle between two "camps" in the ICM. One camp includes those parties and organizations that hold the view that the deployment of CSTO troops was in support of the Kazakhstani government's suppression of legitimate workers' protests. They condemn the deployment. The other consists of those parties and organizations that believe that the CSTO deployment was appropriate because it prevented destabilization of the country and further military encirclement of Russia. They assume that the protests had already taken a different direction and were no longer in the spirit of the workers' movement.

By destabilization, we mean here one that emanates primarily from the U.S. and its allies and

is fundamentally anti-working-class and anti-people in character.

On the basis of the various positions on the situation in Kazakhstan within the ICM, we think we can identify disputes and questions that are on a general level, on the level of understanding the international situation and the imperialist world system. These are important questions of the communist worldview.

In our impression, the situation and development in Kazakhstan has not played a major role in publications from the ICM in recent years, although there have been several articles covering the topic. With regard to current events, deeper analyses and a well-founded presentation of evidence are overshadowed by strong positions, or are otherwise unknown. We see a shortcoming here in the debate in ICM.

With this article, we are also positioning ourselves and presenting our own assessment of the developments in Kazakhstan in short theses. In doing so, we are aware that our horizon is limited in our view of events. More analytical contributions from ICM would have helped us to take a closer look at the events, and we have the impression that we would not have been the only ones to have potentially benefited from such contributions.

In the following, we formulate our theses on the assessment of the events in Kazakhstan in the first section. In the second section of this article, we will identify our open questions in connection with the debate in ICM. The appendix to this



article is a dossier containing those interesting statements from the ICM of which we are aware. We make them available in this form in order to make our own presented positions more comprehensible.

On the developments of the workers' protests in Kazakhstan in early January 2022

1. The protests that occurred in Kazakhstan from 02.01.2022 were protests by the working class of Kazakhstan against the increase in gas prices, and generally against their exploitation and oppression. This new upsurge of strikes and protests began as early as October 2021. It is in continuity with workers' protests and strikes that have been taking place in Kazakhstan for several years. A significant factor to the extent of exploitation and oppression of the working class is the 1991 counterrevolution, which was the starting point of a pointed class struggle from above. The labor movement in Kazakhstan has been illegal for several years – and the formation of trade unions and political parties not easily possible. Already in 2011, the Kazakhstan government proved that it is ready to exercise the harshest repression against the labor movement and to have workers shot - this time, too, it had the workers' protests put down. Despite the illegality and repression, the current protests were also based on a stronger organization of workers and a broad experience of strikes and resistance. We stand in solidarity with the workers of Kazakhstan and their legitimate demands for wage increases, lower energy prices and the repeal of repressive laws against trade unions, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and the Socialist Movement of Kazakhstan.

2. With the temporary occupation of the airport and the burning of government buildings in Almaty, the protests reached a new level of escalation, and various forces attempted to instrumentalize the protests.

With these events, our analysis is insufficient in clearly identifying exactly which forces tried to instrumentalize the workers' protests for their own purposes and to what extent they were successful in doing so. Various forces and disputes are mentioned in the different statements: The power struggle between forces of the Kazakhstani bourgeoisie around former head of government Nursultan Nazarbayev and current head of government Qassym Shomart Tokayev; Western-funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs); fighters of Islamic forces such as the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda or others. In addition, it is also possible that various sections of Kazakhstan's working class, especially impoverished ones, were involved in the escalations. Whether and to what extent they were mobilized by forces hostile to the working class is still unclear to us. When and to what extent the organized labor movement withdrew from the protests and what role a fulfillment of individual demands played is still unclear to us. It was not able to raise the question of power, a fact that underlines the need for the development of independent organization and the leading role of communists.

3. Since the counterrevolution, the Kazakhstan government has been pursuing a so-called multivector policy, i.e., while maintaining a close partnership with Russia, it has developed good political and economic relations with EU countries, the United States, and also China. Kazakhstan is part of the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. In addition, it is part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the "New Silk Road" developed by the People's Republic of China. Finally, Kazakhstan also cooperates with NATO in the "Partnership for Peace" program and is part of the Organization of Turkic States led by Turkey. Monopoly groups from the



USA, the EU and China have significant influence in Kazakhstan's most important economic sectors.

4. The protests and the escalation are in the context of the intensified imperialist confrontation between Russia and NATO (especially the USA and the EU), which is currently being exacerbated by NATO's aggressive policy of the military encirclement of Russia. An assessment of the deployment of CSTO troops in Kazakhstan at the request of the Kazakh government cannot be made lightly without being able to make a sufficient assessment of the situation on the ground. What exactly is the role of the imperialist conflict between Russia and NATO countries in the protests and escalation in Kazakhstan? On the one hand, what role did the CSTO troops play in terms of suppressing the workers' protests? On the other hand, was Kazakhstan threatened with destabilization in the sense of a state of civil war, caused by forces built up from the West or by the internal power struggle of the Kazakhstani bourgeoisie? Such a scenario would have meant fatal consequences for the working class. Did the deployment of the CSTO then serve to stabilize the situation? These questions have not yet been answered for us.

5. Neither the government of Kazakhstan, nor the government of Russia, nor the NATO countries are on the side of the working class. However, this statement alone is not enough for a concrete orientation in the rapid sequence of events in Kazakhstan – for this we need a concrete analysis of the conditions and the events as well as a general understanding of the dynamics in the imperialist world system. There is a danger of orienting the international working class towards an equidistant position with regard to the danger of escalation of NATO's aggression against Russia, if the context of this aggression is left out.

The possibility of destabilization and thus deterioration of the conditions of struggle of the working class, as has occurred in Ukraine, is thereby neglected. Conversely, there is a danger of rallying the international working class under the false flag of Russian imperialism if Russia is not assessed as an imperialist country and is even assumed to have a "principled capacity for peace" or "objective anti-imperialism."

Open questions that we face

We try to take the standpoint of the international working class in such events as in Kazakhstan. **Undoubtedly, the independent organization of the working class and communists is the most important element in class struggle, and the events in Kazakhstan have again demonstrated this necessity.** Nevertheless, questions arise concerning the relationship of the conditions of struggle and the situation of the working class to the policies of the respective imperialist states and the intra-imperialist disputes. In what context are the respective struggles of the working class, what are the political goals for which they can and must fight? How well is the working class organized to use the margins of competition within the bourgeoisie for itself?

Highlighted here is the question of what role war, civil war and occupation mean for the working class and its conditions of struggle, and what consequences the threat of war through a state's policies can have on the working class's orientation to struggle: When is an organized withdrawal the right means to prevent destabilization in the sense of civil war? When is an organized withdrawal necessary to avoid becoming part of a strategy of destruction by Western imperialism?

We want to raise a few more questions that show what difficulties exist in gaining a clear orientation for the working class in these imperialist confrontations.

What is the current dynamic in the world imperialist system?

A relative decline of the U.S. as the leading imperialist world power eclipsed by the rise of China in particular as a direct competitor characterizes the current situation worldwide. These changes are an expression of uneven development in imperialism. However, since the counterrevolution, the U.S. has stood unchallenged at the top of the imperialist world system, influencing the situation and conditions of struggle of the working class and peoples worldwide like no other country. Even today, it has the largest military power in the world, with decades worth of war experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. The U.S. monopolies continue to play a central role in world markets, and through the use of the dollar as the world's reserve currency, the U.S. also has significant economic power. To secure its supremacy, the U.S. and its allies destroy entire countries and leave a trail of devastation in their wake. They do this with extremely reactionary forces, using all means of economic strangulation, military threats and psychological warfare. They also threaten competitors like China and Russia in this way. How do we determine mutual, unequal dependence between countries in a world system which is characterized by this decades-long dominance of the USA? Here we feel that while there are important contributions in the ICM, there is still a need for deeper analysis and understanding of developments in the imperialist world system.

What is Russia's role in the imperialist world system?

Russia is an imperialist state and also represents the interests of the Russian bourgeoisie in international disputes. To state this alone is not enough to determine what influence Russian policy has on the conditions of struggle and the situation of the working class internationally. It is also not enough to determine the position of Russian imperialism in the world system and the current dynamics of the balance of power between the USA, Germany, Russia, China and other states. To what extent is Russia currently in a defensive position or pursuing a defensive strategy in international relations? What does it mean for us when the concrete interests of Russian imperialism coincide with the interests of the working class and peoples of other countries, such as in Syria? How do we concretely determine the different strategies of the imperialist states and assess the significance of each?

The dangers of "equidistance" and the confusion of imperialism with "aggressive foreign policy".

The Syrian example shows that the policies of imperialist states can have different effects on the conditions of struggle of the working class: Russian imperialism, pursuing its own interests, has helped stabilize the Syrian state, preventing it from being destroyed as in Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya. U.S. imperialism has contributed to the destabilization and expansion of the war in Syria. Doesn't it follow that we communists must call these different roles of the various imperialist states by name in communication with the working class and direct the main thrust of our propaganda against the aggressor - in the last decades mainly the US, NATO and EU? Conversely, do we convey the right orientation if we do not put events like in Kazakhstan in the context of the aggression of the USA and the defensive posture of Russian imperialism? We need



to more concretely understand what role the international balance of forces of the main imperialist states plays in the respective struggle of the working class, without propagating false ideas such as that of a supposedly better "multipolar world order." However, if we ignore the relation of forces, a correct working-class orientation cannot come forward.

Aggressive and defensive orientations in the imperialist conflicts are obvious and relevant - but the question of the role of the respective imperialist country cannot be limited to just that. If the policy of the respective states corresponds to the interests of their bourgeoisie, then the same applies to both aggressive and defensive orientations. We have to more precisely answer to what extent the imperialist competition itself determines the means of the imperialist states, and what changes come forth as a result of these respective strategies. What is the current significance of the military and economic subjugation of other states for U.S. imperialism? How does this relate to other forms of imperialist competition?

It is wrong to deduce from the defensive role of Russian imperialism a "principled capacity for peace" or an "objective anti-imperialism." This threatens to negate the character of the Russian state as an imperialist state and to neglect, intentionally or unintentionally, the fundamental task of the working class: To fight imperialism as a system that necessarily always produces war and oppression in various forms. So, what can a working-class orientation look like that recognizes the different concrete effects of the policies of the various states without losing its long-term strategic orientation toward class struggle and socialist revolution?

How do we want to deal with these questions?

The events in Kazakhstan and the related "camp struggle" in the ICM have shown us the lack of a broad, open and qualified debate on the understanding of the imperialist world system. Only through open and explicit clarification on these issues is stronger unity in ICM possible: questions must be asked, critique must be voiced, and positions and analyses must be presented. We are aware of the various initiatives around the "Solidnet," the "European Communist Initiative" and the "International Communist Review" and welcome them wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, it seems to us that more effort is needed, especially from larger parties, to raise the debates to a necessarily higher level - an organized international communist clarification process is needed. Especially for us, as a young and small organization, it is of utmost importance to get to know the positions of other parties and organizations. Beyond simply "getting to know" the positions of other parties, it can help us to genuinely understand the points of view through comprehension of their underlying analyses and to be able to sharpen our own points of view on them.

Knowledge of the struggle of the working class in other countries is important in understanding the commonalities of the struggle of the international working class and its national characteristics. However, the concrete questions facing communists nationally are not purely national matters - they can only be answered correctly from the standpoint of the international working class. Therefore, the main task of communists everywhere in the world is and remains the creation of organizationally strong and ideologically unified communist parties as a prerequisite for the creation of a new Communist International.



We do not expect quick results - however, these questions and discussions must not be put on the back burner. The process of clarification we have initiated is the main means for us to develop our position on important questions such as those of imperialism and class. In addition, it is

current debates like this one on the events in Kazakhstan from which we can learn. In this sense, we want to take steps to continue the discussions both internally and with other organizations and parties.

