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Reply to the Grayzone Slander

Adopted as a Statement by the Utopian Tendency

Jack Gerson

July 2019

On July 6, The Grayzone, a self-described “investigative journalism” web site, published a disgusting article by Grayzone founder Max Blumenthal and Grayzone reporter Ben Norton. The piece targets the sponsors of the “Socialism 2019” conference held in Chicago in early July – DSA, Jacobin, and former members of the recently dissolved ISO – and also slams the magazine *New Politics* and the group Solidarity. It is in the tradition of Stalinist hit jobs; slander truly worthy of the Comintern of the 1930s.

This hit job is Grayzone’s response to speakers at the Socialism 2019 conference who criticized regimes that Grayzone calls “independent foreign governments that are targeted by the US government for regime change, such as Nicaragua, Cuba, Syria, Iran, China, and Russia.” Grayzone’s website is filled with pieces whitewashing the actions of these regimes, with not a single piece critical of their anti-democratic, brutal actions other than to deny that such things happened. Anyone

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Retrieved on 11th August 2021 from utopianmag.com
Published in *The Utopian* Vol. 18.3.

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who raises criticisms is the enemy, an “anti-anti-imperialist”, to be taken down with slander and innuendo.

U.S. imperialism is not the only evil in the world today. But Grayzone acts as though it is, and consequently excuses or, frequently, denies the existence of Assad’s genocide, Putin’s attempt to crush all dissent, China’s mass victimization of the Uighurs and its neocolonial policies in Africa and elsewhere, etc.

The Grayzone article singles out Samuel Farber and Dan LaBotz for a panel they led, “Problems of the U.S. Left: The Cases of Cuba and Nicaragua”:

“Farber accuses Castro of developing a model of ‘state capitalism,’ wielding a term Trotskyite ideologues routinely fling at any revolutionary government that is insufficiently pure. He calls for ‘a revolutionary democratic alternative ... through socialist resistance from below.’ The concept of regime change ‘from below’ is also central to the rhetoric of exile groups like the People’s MEK, a US – and – Saudi – backed cult of personality that calls for toppling Iran’s government through ‘indigenous regime change.’”

Here, Grayzone equates a call for a revolutionary democratic alternative through socialist resistance from below with “regime change”, implying that it’s shorthand for collaboration with western imperialism. Indeed, in article after article on the Grayzone website (For example: “The Syrian Delusion”; “Regime Change in Nicaragua”; “Russiagate has imploded after Robert Mueller’s investigation found no evidence of Trump-Russia collusion”; “The UN did not report China has massive internment camps for Uighur Muslims”) a couple of messages come through clearly:

- There are no atrocities, no repression – reports to the contrary are lies planted by U.S. imperialism. Assad never used poison gas or bombed civilians; China does not victimize the Uighurs; Putin is given a bad rap; Ortega is popular with the Nicaraguan masses aside from a few violent priests; etc.
- And anyway, if there are atrocities, they're necessary. Grayzone scoffs at the idea of the masses seizing power and establishing a revolutionary democratic socialist society ruled from below. Only counter-revolutionary "Trotskyite ideologues" and irresponsible anarchists would criticize these regimes and call for that – it's shorthand for regime change. Besides, even if things are bad in the statist regimes, they're worse in Honduras, so grin and bear it: (Grayzone headline: "'We're worse than Venezuela:' Hondurans in US-backed regime speak out.")

So, the Grayzone's approach is clear, if familiar: Masses, know your place. Do not question your "progressive" leaders. Do as they say. Do not agitate for democratic rights, let alone for directly controlling what and how much to produce, who gets what, etc. That only aids U.S. imperialism.

Where have we seen this before? Well, Hungary 1956, when the Stalinists insisted that the Hungarian Revolution was a counter-revolutionary coup and supported its suppression by Russian tanks. Prague 1968; Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s; ... In instance after instance, mass movements against repressive state capitalist regimes were denounced as reactionary imperialist-dominated counter-revolutionaries. In the struggle against fascism in Germany, and in the Spanish Civil War, anti-Stalinist fighters were denounced as being simultaneously fascists and ultraleftists (much as Grayzone targets any opponents of "independent foreign governments" as agents of imperialism and ultraleftists).

For decades, anti-Stalinists in the U.S. were denounced verbally and frequently attacked physically by the Stalinists of the CPUSA – slandered viciously meetings broken up, etc. For the past few decades – with the marginalization of the CPUSA and the marginalization of Maoism – such attacks have receded. But they’re on the rise again now, and the Grayzone is only one instance. Rewriting and airbrushing history is well under way.

For example:

- At a recent left forum in Oakland, the three speakers, all well-known Bay Area leftists, insisted that the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 wasn’t a massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators at all, but rather, self-defense by the army provoked by violent demonstrators, and with few civilian casualties.
- The Stalinist “scholar” Grover Furr has discovered that Leon Trotsky was a Japanese agent.
- Some leftists even see Putin as the heir to Stalin, and Putin’s Russia as reviving the USSR – and like it.

The “investigative” journalism the Grayzone prides itself on consists largely of demonstrating that oppositionists to their favored regimes receive money directly or indirectly from US government groups, especially the National Endowment for Democracy. The fact is that US imperialism will always try to infiltrate and otherwise influence and subvert oppositionists in these countries. That’s something to be aware of and to watch out for. But the best way to take it on is to support genuine oppositionists – to encourage and aid movements fighting against oppression for democratic rights, and to encourage them to deepen their fight to struggle for a revolutionary democratic alternative, for socialism from below. The worst thing is to slam the door in their face, to tell them that the only alternative to

western imperialism is the oppressive regime that brutalizes them, and to slander all opponents of the regime. But discouraging and weakening all movements from below in the regimes of Syria, Nicaragua et al is in reality Grayzone’s objective.

We of the Utopian tendency stand for anti-statist, anti-authoritarian, libertarian socialism. We don’t agree with much of the politics and overall approach of the groups slandered by the Grayzone, such as their support for the Bernie Sanders campaign. But regardless of our differences with these groups, there’s an overriding issue here, and that is the need to stand against, repudiate, and expose Stalinist slander campaigns. No one should give credence to the Grayzone’s slanders. Everyone should understand how destructive they are to the causes of liberty, democracy, and socialism.