

Opportunism as Futile Way Out of the Crises of Bourgeois Society



Interview with Stefan Engel, head of the editorial team *Revolutionärer Weg*, on the publication of the book, or *Revolutionärer Weg*, No. 37, entitled *The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology and of Opportunism*

Stefan Engel, head of the theoretical organ of the MLPD, *Revolutionärer Weg*, since 1991, and party chairman for 37 years (until April 2017)

At the beginning of January 2022, the book, The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology and of Opportunism, will be published. What awaits interested readers?

This book is the second part of our four-part book series entitled *The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology, and the Doctrine of the Mode of Thinking*. It deals with the many different **variations of opportunism of the present time**, all of which profess to draw conclusions from various crises or new social problems. Since all of them originated on the basis of bourgeois ideology, sooner or later they will fail, just like the old bourgeois ideas to which they supposedly represent an alternative.

Opportunism has been a current in the working-class movement since its beginnings. For over 100 years it has been an **essential concomitant of the imperialist world system**. Lenin criticized “*opportunism for the very reason that it sacrifices the **fundamental** interests of the movement to momentary advantages or considerations based on the most short-sighted, superficial calculations.*” (“Two Worlds,” Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 309)

Opportunism has already done much damage in the revolutionary working-class movement and was able to greatly hinder the liberation struggle of the working class and oppressed peoples at certain times. It is ultimately doomed to failure because it does not correspond to objective reality. It only stirs up illusions in the capitalist societal system, exacerbates exploitation and oppression of the workers, and only needlessly prolongs the sufferings of the broad masses.

Opportunism does not disappear by itself, because it is constantly reproduced anew by imperialism.

The **polemics** against opportunism developed in the book aim at helping to understand its reactionary nature and the superiority of scientific socialism.

We are in the midst of the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, despite extensive vaccination, is bringing the world new record numbers of people infected, seriously ill and dying from the pandemic. In light of this dramatic development, isn't there anything more important than addressing opportunism?

Even though the vast majority of the population is complying with the government call for vaccination, social distancing and regular testing, there is still a great deal of concern about the crisis management of the federal and state governments. I am not speaking now about the reactionary “protest” of the so-called “Querdenker” (“lateral thinkers”), which can hardly be surpassed in absurdity, but about the justified desire of the majority of the population for sound education, timely and appropriate protection against the COVID-19 virus, and a functioning health care system. The fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has not even subsided yet, and a fifth wave is already looming. You have the impression that the same mistakes and failures in crisis management are occurring over and over again, unnecessarily resulting in hundreds of thousands of illnesses and thousands of new fatalities. Are we just dealing with a bunch of fools or ignoramuses in the government? What are the reasons that crisis management fails again and again? Why does the government always want to just “drive by sight,” even though everyone knows by now that the pandemic can and must be vigorously countered in time, before it spreads exponentially, and not first when hundreds of thousands have been infected and thousands have died?

Our new book is primarily concerned with the ideological foundations of the disastrous crisis management, especially with **neopragmatism** and **positivism**. For neopragmatism, the sole criterion is “immediate usefulness.” This is nothing else than the justification of the subjugation of the entire society to the interests of capital. Not a single problem of the masses can be solved on this basis. Together with its twin brother, positivism, neopragmatism rejects any scientific basis and therefore cannot make accurate prognoses. This, however, would be literally vital for comprehensive prophylaxis in fighting the pandemic. The positivist method of trial and error is grossly negligent, and in the case of crisis management against the COVID-19 pandemic inhumane.

These two directions in bourgeois ideology are the basis of all crisis management, which today belongs to the foremost tasks of every imperialist and capitalist government.

The focus of the book is not primarily on crisis management in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nor would that be appropriate, because it is precisely part of bourgeois crisis management to act as if the COVID-19 pandemic is the only problem facing humanity today. Not a word is said, for example, about the current global economic and financial crisis that already began in 2018. Instead, economic problems are misleadingly and one-sidedly subsumed under the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, hardly anyone talks about the class struggle anymore, only about the dispute with the “Querdenker.” If you listen to bourgeois politicians, the population is now divided into vaccination supporters and vaccination opponents, and no longer primarily into capitalists and workers.

As the capitalist crisis chaos grows, we also witness widespread ideological disorientation among the masses. Every politically thinking and responsibly acting person must today ask themselves how they stand with regard to the worldwide capitalist system. In addition to absurd wealth, it produces misery for millions and puts the basis of human life at risk. Does that mean that we should howl with the wolves and finally bury the dream of a liberated society, only because socialism had to accept a temporary defeat by the revisionist betrayal in the Soviet Union or in China? Or do we help the gigantic progress of scientific knowledge

and practical achievements in social production to break through against the maelstrom of pragmatism and opportunism, and join in the necessary revolutionary transformation of society?

Can you give an overview of the book for our readers?

The book begins with a polemic against US philosopher Francis Fukuyama's fantasies about the "**end of history**." After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, he expressed the wishful thinking of those in power that capitalism had triumphed over socialism once and for all. The book goes on to deal with **neoliberalism's admission of bankruptcy**. It shows the **shambles of bourgeois economics** in the crisis management of the governments in the world economic and financial crisis of 2008 to 2014. The book conducts a fundamental criticism of the **neoreformism** developed by Gerhard Schröder and Tony Blair, the crisis of which has continued and deepened in Germany since the Schröder/Fischer government was voted out of office in 2005.

In addition, analysis and criticism of new variants of **neorevisionism** are continued. These include the theories of the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping, the reactionary idealist "**Juche theory**" of Kim Il Sung in North Korea, as well as **Trotskyism**, **Parlor Marxism**, or various **anti-authoritarian and anarchist theories** in the spectrum of the so-called "radical left."

With digitalization's campaign for conquest, a real **hype** has arisen around **digitalization**. All associated bourgeois and petty-bourgeois theories create new illusions about capitalist reality and oppose a revolutionary transformation of capitalism. What proves necessary is instead a sober analysis of how the modern productive forces are developing as the material preparation for socialism and how, at the same time, they are massively unfolding their destructive effects in the imperialist world system.

The book demonstrates that all variants of opportunism are characterized by distancing themselves from scientific socialism, by falsifying or even rejecting dialectical and historical materialism, and by disregarding or even denying the revolutionary class struggle and the leading role of the working class in it.

The working class and the broad masses must learn to see through all these opportunist forms of bourgeois ideology. Without dealing successfully with the essential varieties of opportunism, there will be no new upswing in the struggle for socialism.

In the September 2021 federal elections, the SPD and the Greens were able to recover to some extent and form a new government together with the FDP. Is this already the end of the crisis of reformism?

The half-life of all attempts to revive reformism with new variants is getting shorter and shorter. The "socio-ecological transformation" proclaimed in grand terms by the new government, which for the moment still raises certain hopes among the masses, also will be shattered by the reality of imperialism. In the coalition agreement, there is no option for preventing the rapid change into a global environmental catastrophe, and no correspondingly urgent and drastic immediate measures. Instead, the SPD/FDP/Green government holds out the vague prospect of so-called "climate neutrality" by 2045, according to which greenhouse gas emissions and compensatory measures are supposed to balance each other out. Cynically,

there is even discussion at the EU level that nuclear power should be counted as sustainable energy.

There is no mention of how the government intends to tackle the threatening **ozone hole**, the **extinction of species** that is jeopardizing the food basis of humankind, the deforestation of **tropical rainforests**, the increasing **nuclear contamination** of the world, the rapid **overexploitation of natural resources**, the dramatic **waste proliferation and pollution** of entire landscapes, and the **collapse of the oceans**, which, after all, produce the majority of the world's oxygen. Environmental protection serves the governing parties merely as an election campaign strategy and as legitimation for an investment program subsidized by taxpayers' money as an inexhaustible source of profit for finance capital. The new government cannot offer more than that, because resolute environmental protection is incompatible with the maintenance of the imperialist world system and its mode of production.

Capitalism cannot be "transformed" because its laws cannot be arbitrarily abolished. The militant youth environmental movement must and will also understand this and turn to scientific socialism with the help of our rank-and-file work.

In the new book there is also a section entitled, "Renaissance of fascist ideologies on a new basis," and a section on "conspiracy theories." How do such openly reactionary directions fit into the book, which deals mainly with opportunism?

Neofascism and fascist **conspiracy theories** are, of course, not part of opportunism. The point of the book is that the rise of neofascism cannot be countered with opportunism. The "lateral thinkers" movement, which is largely organized and shaped by the neofascists, can only fish among the mass of esotericists, anti-vaccinationists and other petty-bourgeois strata because these people do not take a principled anti-fascist stand. Of course, it is legitimate to criticize the government's crisis management. But not all criticism is progressive and benefits the working-class movement. Marching alongside fascists against the government is to be condemned and opposed on principle.

The MLPD takes an exceptionally critical stand on the crisis management of the federal government in the COVID-19 pandemic. It explicitly benefits the ruling international monopolies, shifts the burden of the pandemic onto the broad masses and restricts their bourgeois-democratic rights and freedoms. We take a zero covid stand because we believe that every covid infection, every covid death must be avoided. Surely it is cynical to say we allow infection rates to go as far as there are beds in intensive care units, knowing full well that this is a death sentence for tens of thousands of people. We have no understanding whatsoever for such anti-human policies, because we are ideologically committed to the interests of the working class and the broad mass of the population, and not to the profit maximization of the ruling monopolies.

There are ideological reasons why conspiracy myths can cause confusion even in the working-class movement. As the myths go, COVID-19 is nothing more than a flu, and a "global financial elite" has deliberately orchestrated the COVID-19 pandemic in order to enslave all of humanity with an arranged "reset." As if we have not been living for a long time in an imperialist world system where a small group of international finance capital exercises its sole rule over the whole of society.

It is not immediately obvious why people whom we have hitherto experienced as progressive can adopt such abstruse constructs. The widespread view that "those at the top are capable of anything" is undoubtedly based on the experience of the masses. However, the petty-bourgeois opportunist mode of thinking generates a willingness to follow such conspiracy

myths. In addition, the “lateral thinkers” movement appeals to the petty-bourgeois individualist mode of thinking that is very widespread in today’s society, according to which people’s “freedom” consists in doing or not doing what they want.

The revolutionary working-class movement and scientific socialism have a different concept of freedom. They assume that freedom consists above all in the appreciation of necessity. And if the working class can only gain its freedom to strike, to demonstrate, to assemble, and to keep itself and its families as healthy as possible by getting vaccinated, then it has no problem whatsoever with universal compulsory vaccination.

Only with a clear proletarian class standpoint is it possible to distinguish between justified criticism of the government and reactionary and even fascist demagogy.

The book appears eight months after the first volume, The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology and of Anticommunism. This is a relatively short period of time.

We worked on all four volumes simultaneously for years. Therefore, the last eight months were only for the completion of the second volume, and not the period for its entire elaboration.

It is a certain advantage for dissemination, in-depth study and discussion to publish each number separately. It can prove to be a disadvantage if this results in loss of the inner coherence of the four volumes. Therefore, it is necessary to keep the interval between the publication of the individual volumes as short as possible. Most recently, the book, *The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology and of Anticommunism*, was published. There is a close connection between anticommunism and opportunism. Thus, opportunism in the “left movement” today is essentially fed by retreat, by creeping, by conformity – in other words, by opportunism – in the face of anticommunism.

The new book takes issue with a number of philosophers and politicians, some of whom are highly regarded by allies. Shouldn’t such ideological disputes be put aside for the sake of alliance policy?

Proletarian alliance policy, whether in a unity of action or in work in non-party self-run organizations, should always take place on the basis of common struggle, cooperation without regard for political affiliation, financial independence, and openness as regards world outlook. This is not to be understood as sweeping ideological or political contradictions under the rug. Rather, practical cooperation and the resulting relationship of trust offer the best opportunities to resolve controversial issues by mutual agreement. The book states in this regard:

“Alliance policy with many of the currents criticized in this book must unfold the dialectics of unity in common struggle and preservation of ideological and political independence.”

For example, we deal critically with Abdullah Öcalan, who propagates the illusion of a “democratic confederalism” and at the same time denigrates “Marxism-Leninism as failed.” Since this “democratic confederalism” is supposed to take place without system change, it presupposes, of course, that the ruling international finance capital voluntarily and peacefully renounces its unrestricted power. History has long proven that such a thing does not work in an imperialist world structure armed to the teeth. Why should we hide our criticism of this? Our sincere solidarity with the Kurdish liberation struggle cannot be interpreted and practiced as the uncritical adoption of false views.

Only on the basis of principled ideological debate can the strategic alliance of the working class with the small and middle farmers and the petty-bourgeois intellectual intermediate strata be prepared. In contrast, alliances that dispense with such a debate and are based on opportunistic adaptation to false views have no prospects for the future or for success. This insight is especially important for the youth, which is why we will present the book to the public for the first time at the Lenin-Liebkecht-Luxemburg demonstration in January in Berlin.

Thank you for the interview and congratulations on the new book!



The polemics developed against opportunism in the book, *The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology and of Opportunism*, aim at helping to understand opportunism's reactionary nature and the superiority of scientific socialism. The book will be translated into several languages.