



Internationale

Forschungsstelle

DDR

presents



## “FRIENDSHIP!”

*A research archive on the anti-imperialist strategy and international solidarity of the DDR and the socialist camp*

According to the prevailing public opinion today, anti-imperialism, internationalism, and social and national liberation are outdated concepts, dusty relics from the era of colonial rule and inter-systemic competition. With the independence of the colonised nations and the worldwide triumph of capitalism, it is said that these concepts belong to a bygone chapter of history.

Yet more than thirty years after the defeat of the socialist camp and more than 60 years after the zenith of the national liberation movements, hunger, poverty, and a lack of access to education and health care remain a terrible reality for billions of people, despite all technological and scientific progress. Exploitation, oppression, and inequality, as well as economic backwardness and dependency in most nations, continue to characterise the face of our time.

The process of internationalisation pursued under the slogan of globalisation has not brought peoples closer together, but rather intensified the competitive relations between countries. Those pushing this process deny the existence of neo-colonial oppression, using cosmopolitan slogans of a world citizenry to mask the mechanisms that are exacerbating international inequality. Following the victory of the liberation movements, imperialism brought forth not the overcoming of economic and social backwardness, but adapted forms for economic, political, military, and ideological dependence. Mechanisms such as a global debt system, control over logistics and trade routes, technological superiority, embargoes, and brain drain, alongside a wide range of economic, political, legal, and military institutions have ensured the continuity of a system of international dominance by the most powerful owners of private property. The political control, economic domination and military threat thus created condemn most working people to economic and social poverty and the countries of the South to maldevelopment. There is resistance to this global offensive of imperialism, but it is largely spontaneous and fragmented. Our relationship to the history of the anti-imperialist movement of the last century – its concepts, struggles and theories – is often obscured and broken. Through the re-discovery and re-appropriation of these experiences, it is possible to gain an orientation and acquire a new drive for the tasks of the present.

Internationalism has always been a fundamental principle of the workers' movement. To the degree that capitalism conquered the world, resistance to oppression and exploitation had to internationalise. Since "the emancipation of labour is neither a local, nor a national, but a social problem", as Marx states in the statutes of the International Workers Association, it is necessarily an international task. Proletarian internationalism is the recognition of the convergence of the social interests of workers worldwide. This realisation is the fundamental principle of their political organisation: "Workers of the world, unite!"

With the turn of the 20th century, capitalism underwent a qualitative change as it entered its imperialist phase. In the most developed capitalist countries, global monopolies and a financial oligarchy emerged, further deepening the inequality with the countries of the capitalist periphery. Colonies in the Global South were plundered more intensively for cheap raw materials and labour than before. Shortly thereafter, the foundation of the socialist camp was also established through the victory of the October Revolution. With the aim of pushing back imperialism, the task of linking national struggles for sovereignty and independence with the movements and countries of socialism shifted onto the agenda. From the outset, this alliance was hampered by the bribery of certain sections of the working class in the capitalist mother countries. A share of the colonial profits was dealt out to these workers to bind them to the exploitative system. There thus emerged an effective mechanism to split the international labour movement and fuel chauvinism in the Global North. In the imperialist core, it became necessary to struggle for consciousness of the working class, to raise awareness about the situation of the oppressed peoples and the common interests of the anti-imperialist movement.

Against this background, the German Democratic Republic (DDR), as a member of the socialist camp, developed an extensive programme for solidarity, cooperation, and alliance with progressive forces throughout the world. "Friendship" became a popular slogan expressing close ties to the Soviet Union and the Eastern European people's democracies; this principle was a lesson and imperative after fascist Germany's war of extermination. The youth organisation of the DDR, the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*) adopted "friendship" as its axiom, sending brigades all over the world to help build schools, hospitals, and manufacturing plants. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and the mass organisations of the DDR developed close relations and alliances with the forces of anti-imperialism and national liberation movements.

The task of organising the movement for socialism on a world scale and of linking the different levels of the struggles into a unified movement culminated in proletarian internationalism. In this process, a multitude of complicated questions and contradictions arose for the practical orientation of the international workers' movement. Controversial discussions broke out within international organisations, states, and movements to answer these questions. The struggles for national independence and against (neo)colonial oppression were composed of different classes and strata. Formations such as the non-aligned movement emerged, which did not take a course towards a socialist transformation and yet objectively pursued an anti-imperialist tendency. How could the national liberation struggle be strategically and practically linked to proletarian internationalism? What role did the anti-imperialist struggle play in the further spread and development of socialism in the world? Which forces were to be supported by the socialist camp, how were different class forces and organisations to be addressed? After the successful victory of national independence, how could the path of non-capitalist development be pursued and supported by the socialist states? To what extent did international solidarity play an effective role and how was it put into practice?

In the research archive "Friendship!", we examine the experiences, ideological debates, and the development of the anti-imperialist, internationalist strategy of the DDR and the socialist camp. With concise articles and interviews, the archive aims to shed light on the different aspects of the practical orientation of the international class struggle and explore the contradictions and ideological discussions. By bringing the experiences of this highly dynamic and productive phase of anti-imperialism from the last century into the present, this platform should serve to enrich the level of today's debate and inspire future struggles.

