

# UKRAINE RESISTS!

LEFT VOICES ON PUTIN'S WAR,  
NATO AND THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE

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# Introduction

*By Federico Fuentes<sup>1</sup>*

The ongoing war in Ukraine triggered by Russian president Vladimir Putin's decision to invade is arguably the most important geopolitical event to confront the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Beyond the devastating destruction unleashed by Russia's invasion and the heroic fightback of the Ukrainian people, the war represents the opening salvos in a new period of increased militarisation, intensifying great power rivalry, heightened conflict over spheres of influence and greater domination of oppressed nations.

As with almost all wars, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has generated huge challenges for leftists, progressives and democrats. Unsurprisingly, it has opened up important discussions among socialists and anti-war activists on questions such as imperialism, self-determination and what international solidarity should look like.

With this in mind, Resistance Books is publishing this unique compilation of interviews with socialists and progressives from Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Norway, Germany, Turkey, Brazil, Australia, Britain and the United States. These interviews were originally published in *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal* and its sister publication *Green Left*. The aim of the interviews — and this book — is to listen to those resisting on the frontlines of this war, better understand their views on the complex situations they face and learn from voices that are rarely heard, particularly in the imperialist West. Together, the interviews comprise an invaluable insight into how leftists from different countries are responding to the challenges of resisting Russia's brutal invasion, opposing the broader war aims of the United States-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and supporting progressive Ukrainian forces fighting back against the invasion and their own government's neoliberal agenda.

The interviewees at times express differing opinions on important issues, such as the US and NATO's degree of responsibility in generating the conflict and the desirability of sanctions on Russia. Nevertheless, they are unanimous in supporting the Ukraine people's right to resist, their right to self-determination and their urgent need to receive material solidarity from left and progressive people around the world.

The sequencing of the book is no accident: priority has been given to socialist and progressive voices from Ukraine who are at the forefront of this fight. The Ukraine section opens with political economist Yuliya Yurchenko and historian Hanna Perekhoda providing some much-needed background to Ukrainian politics from independence in 1991 to the start of the war. This is crucial, Yurchenko explains, because domestic dynamics are extremely important in understanding “how irresponsible, self-serving local politicians created the conditions that made foreign interventions more possible.” While Yurchenko outlines how Ukraine’s predatory bloc of oligarchs — with its competing rival groups and contradictory alliances — sowed the seeds of internal conflict and revolt from below, Perekhoda takes us through Ukraine’s long and complex relationship with Russia, the role of language in the conflict and the realities of the Donbas region, where she was born and raised. To complement these interviews, we have published “Questions on Ukraine” by Ukrainian philosopher and feminist Daria Saburova as an appendix. First translated into English for *LINKS*, Saburova’s piece systematically addresses numerous questions arising from this period in Ukrainian politics, including the nature of the Maidan (also known as Euromaidan or Revolution of Dignity) and anti-Maidan protests in 2014, the Minsk Accords and the role of the far-right in Ukraine.

The ensuing five interviews in this section turn to the “on-the-ground” realities facing Ukrainian progressives. Ukrainian socialists Vitaliy Dudin and Vladyslav Starodubtsev — interviewed at different moments in the war — shed light on the scale and depth of resistance and how the war has “revolutionised politics” in Ukraine. Starodubtsev presents an overview of Ukrainian perceptions of NATO, the European Union and the government of president Volodymyr Zelensky, while Dudin tackles the issue of how Ukrainian socialists regard NATO-EU countries supplying Ukraine with weapons. We then turn to mineworkers’ union leader Nataliya Levytska, feminist activist Viktoriia Pihul and Ecoaction’s Mykhailo Amosov for an appreciation of the effects of the invasion on different sectors of Ukrainian society and how workers, women and environmentalists continue to campaign for their rights, even amid war. The three also share their conception of what a pro-worker, feminist and green reconstruction of Ukraine should look like.

Yurchenko, Perekhoda, Saburova, Dudin and Starodubtsev are all members of Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement), a democratic socialist organisation composed mainly of young activists and formed in the aftermath of the Maidan rebellion. Bringing together student and labour activists from various left and anti-Stalinist traditions, Social Movement was set up as a broad, radical left organisation that campaigns against capitalism and bigotry and for democracy and socialism. A detailed interview with Social Movement

activists Nataliia Lomonosova and Oleksandr Kyselov has been published as an appendix, in which they discuss the organisation's history, politics and forms of organising.

The second section is dedicated to Russian voices simultaneously resisting Putin's war on Ukraine and his parallel war on opposition protesters at home. Russian socialist Ilya Matveev, from the editorial collective of anti-war website *Posle* (After), makes the case for why the Western left needs to update its theory of imperialism and come to terms with Russian imperialism. Then Boris Kagarlitsky, editor of the socialist website *Rabkor* (Worker Correspondent), explores the domestic factors underpinning Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and argues why Putin is seeking an "everlasting war" that he cannot win. Activists from Feministskoye protivoyennoye soprotivleniye (Feminist Anti-War Resistance) take time out from organising anti-war actions and consciousness-raising to discuss their assessment of the current state of the anti-war movement inside Russia, the likelihood of revolt against Putin and how to strengthen solidarity with their Ukrainian sisters. Completing this section, Kirill Medvedev of the Rossiyskoe socialisticheskoe dvizhenie (Russian Socialist Movement), takes readers through the different forms of resistance emerging within Russia, and offers a progressive Russian perspective on issues such as NATO, arms supplies to Ukraine and the Donbas.

The third section is dedicated to socialist voices from around the world who analyse the war within the broader context of great power rivalry and its impact on domestic politics in their respective countries. The section begins with the voices of socialists from countries bordering Ukraine and Russia. Zofia Malisz, from Lewica Razem (Left Together), not only provides an appraisal of Polish politics, the war and NATO, but introduces us to the left in Eastern Europe, so often invisibilised or ignored. Contrary to the common misconception of the region as "essentially authoritarian and full of far-right nationalists" Malisz posits we do not have to look hard to "discover inspiring left movements implementing progressive change in their country and municipal politics." Tobias Drevland Lund, from Norway's Rødt (Red Party), summarises some of the intense debates within his party over the war and the challenging reality of developing a left defence policy in a NATO member country bordering Russia.

Two countries that, in different ways, have been particularly impacted by the fallout from the war are Germany and Turkey. Ecosocialist Christian Zeller notes that the war has brought to an end Germany's decades-long orientation of greater energy integration with Russia, in which "the main German capitalist groups have traditionally promoted good relations with Russia". Alongside dealing with what this means for Germany's ties with Russia and the United States, Zeller sketches out an ecosocialist approach towards the interrelated issues of climate, war, gas prices and international solidarity. Following this, Halkların Demokratik Partisi (People's Democratic Party) Foreign Affairs Commission

co-spokesperson Hisyar Özsoy describes how Turkey's government has sought to exploit Putin's war to increase its geopolitical influence and escalate its long-lasting war against the Kurdish people in Turkey and northern and eastern Syria.

After this, Israel Dutra, of the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (Socialism and Liberty Party), interrogates the role of Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in attempting to mediate the conflict. Dutra also delineates the dual battle that the left faces internationally, of opposing imperialism and combating the rise of the extreme right.

The final three interviews are with socialists from Australia, Britain and the United States — the core nations behind the recently created “Anglo” military alliance AUKUS. Sam Wainwright, from the Socialist Alliance, explains how the organisation has sought to avoid the twin pitfalls of falling in behind the liberal narrative that portrays the war as one between Western democracy and Russian autocracy, while refusing to characterise the conflict as a proxy war between the West and Russia, in which Ukraine is erased as a mere puppet of Washington. Wainwright makes the case that AUKUS must be seen in the wider context of the proposal to extend NATO to the Indo-Pacific and why it — along with the current US-led war drive on China — must be opposed. To complement Wainwright's contribution, Socialist Alliance statements on Russia's war on Ukraine and the war drive on China have been included as appendices.

British socialist and Anti\*Capitalist Resistance member Phil Hearse details the complexities of dealing with the fact that “Ukraine's just defensive struggle for self-determination is overlain by, and intersects with, inter-imperialist conflict and the push for war against Russia and China” in the West, and explains why AUKUS is “effectively the Pacific version of NATO”. Finally, US ecosocialist Howie Hawkins discusses the challenges of building solidarity with Ukraine while opposing US imperialism from within the “belly of the beast”. Arguing that the left “should support US military aid to Ukraine at the same time as we campaign against US militarism and imperialism,” Hawkins makes clear that support for the Ukrainian people's war of self-defence should not entail political support for US imperialism or the Zelensky government.

To aid readability, some interviews have been abridged to remove elements that have subsequently lost relevance or focus on issues other than the war. Links to where readers can find the original interviews have been included in the notes at the end of the book for those wishing to read them in their entirety. Historic background to certain organisations has been retained in a number of interviews, given many readers may not be acquainted with the details.

Taken together, these interviews constitute an essential guide for socialists and anti-war activists grappling with the war in Ukraine and the dangerous realities of the world we are now entering. ■



# **Voices from Ukraine**



# Yuliya Yurchenko

## **‘To understand Ukraine, we need to look at domestic dynamics not supposed Western coups’<sup>2</sup>**

*Ukrainian socialist and author of Ukraine and the Empire of Capital, Yuliya Yurchenko, discusses the key domestic factors that shaped Ukrainian politics from independence to Russia’s invasion, with Federico Fuentes.*

**In your book, you insist on looking at domestic factors to understand how Ukraine got to where it is today. Why? Could you outline these factors?**

A lot of discussion on Ukraine revolves around international tensions — between NATO and Russia, or the United States and Russia — with Ukraine viewed as a blanket being pulled in different directions. But we need to look at what has happened inside Ukraine to understand how we went from a country that voted overwhelmingly to become independent in 1991 — including in Crimea and Donbas — to the “referendum” to annex Crimea and the separatist “republics” in Donbas in 2014. Domestic dynamics are extremely important to understanding how irresponsible, self-serving local politicians created the conditions that made foreign interventions more possible.

In the 1990s, oligarchic groups emerged in different parts of Ukraine. At that time, Russia was weakened economically and politically destabilised. Russia’s pull in the region had also been weakened. This created space for domestic capital in Ukraine to grow without too much foreign intervention. By the end of the ’90s, an important bloc of energy-intensive industrial capital had emerged in the east with strong economic ties to Putin’s regime, due to reliance on gas imports.

Out of these different oligarchic groups emerged leaders who competed for political power. One was Viktor Yanukovych — linked to this Donbas industrial capital in the

east. He ran for president against Viktor Yushchenko [a pro-Western oligarch aligned with Dnipropetrovsk industrial capital] in the fraudulent 2004 elections that led to the Orange Revolution<sup>3</sup>, and again in 2010, by which time Yushchenko was running as the incumbent president. Both elections were framed at winning the votes of the majority of people in either the east (Yanukovych) or west (Yushchenko). This divisive political framing of election campaigns was pivotal in solidifying the idea of “two Ukraines”.

### Did Russia play any role in fomenting this idea and, if so, why?

Russia started promoting the idea of *Russky mir* (“Russian world”) [which encompasses all Russian speakers] years before the 2013-14 events through local media outlets, particularly in Crimea and Donbas, which have the largest ethnically Russian populations within Ukraine.

Russia’s imperial ambitions were reinvigorated with the fall of the Soviet Union. We can see this in Putin’s speeches where he refers to Ukraine as little more than a province of Russia — one without its own political subjectivity, its own culture, its own language. Putin’s fascism is built on a narrative not of differences but sameness: that we are all the same people who speak the same language and, therefore, must all be in the same country. By understanding the historical relationship between Ukraine and Russia of extermination and exclusion of Ukrainian language, culture and literature, you start to understand why so many people in Ukraine are bilingual or just speak Russian and do not speak Ukrainian very well.

This vision of a shared destiny was part of Russia’s claims over Donbas, but there is an economic component too. There are a lot of industries in Donbas — and in the south of Ukraine — that are deeply integrated with Russian industry, making components for its military and other production lines that Russia does not want to lose control over.

Up until 2014, Russia tried soft indoctrination to maintain its influence and control in Ukraine; but when that failed it turned to military intervention.

### What about the role of Ukraine’s moves to integrate into the European Union?

Under Yushchenko, you had a process of Ukraine-EU rapprochement, in which a free trade agreement was signed. By 2013, Yanukovych’s government was about to sign the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement it helped draft. But Yanukovych refused to sign at the last minute due to pressure from Russia and some local oligarchs. Had Yanukovych managed to maintain close cooperation with Russia and handed over actual decision-making to Russia, maybe the subsequent war and invasion would not have happened. But Ukrainians did not agree to that.

### And this is what kicked off the Maidan protests?

The protests began with Yanukovych's refusal to sign the agreement, but Maidan did not properly kick off until the night of November 30, when Yanukovych sent police to beat up protesters in the main square of Kyiv. After that, the protests became massive, with over a million people gathering in Kyiv, a city of just a few million people. Protesters now demanded Yanukovych's resignation and immediate elections, with protests spreading to squares all across Ukraine, including Donetsk, Luhansk, Odesa and Crimea. Surveys done about a week after the protests found the main reasons people attended were police brutality, lawlessness, corruption and social economic deprivation. The EU agreement was seventh or eighth on the list.

Maidan was not a Western-planted coup, it was an expression of dissent and frustration. It was a protest movement that had been brewing for decades. There were many protests in the years leading up to it over socioeconomic problems, against predatory real estate developers, against corruption, against police impunity. People were sick of all that.

### Yet out of Maidan emerged what you refer to as “authoritarian fascicising neoliberal kleptocracy”...

To understand why I talk about authoritarian fascicisation and neoliberal kleptocracy in post-2014 Ukraine, we need to understand who Petro Poroshenko was and how he came to be president. Poroshenko had been on the scene of Ukrainian mainstream politics for decades. He is an oligarch who held all sorts of important seats prior to his election in 2014. When Poroshenko and other oligarchs and politicians addressed protesters demanding Yanukovych's resignation, they were booed because they were seen as part of the same oligarchic regime of neoliberal kleptocracy that people wanted to do away with.

After Yanukovych fled, Putin said the new Ukrainian interim president and government were illegitimate, that there had been a coup, and that therefore Russia had to liberate people in Ukraine from this “junta”. Putin then moved to annex Crimea and his stooges started a war in Donbas. Under the Ukrainian constitution, the elected president is also the Commander-in-Chief of the army, and only they can take the country to war. The oligarchs, in particular Poroshenko, utilised this conjuncture to say: “Look we understand that everyone wants to change the people in government; we understand your frustration. But we have a war in the country and we need to act fast. We need someone who has experience and knows how to coordinate the military. We need someone in charge pronto, so we need to elect a president in the first round to organise the military to defend Donbas.” This was the discourse that got him

elected in the spring of 2014. He would not have won if the war in Donbas had not started. The end result was that the achievements of the revolution were hijacked by these oligarchs.

It is also important to note that following the blood that was spilled in Maidan, unsavoury right-wing forces began organising self-defence groups to protect protesters. Together with citizens of every ilk, they formed volunteer battalions that went to fight in Donbas. The widespread message of these groups that I heard personally was: “Once we kick the Russians out, we’re going to deal with the crooks in the government”. Poroshenko sought to absorb some of the nationalist, patriotic rhetoric of the volunteer battalion into his 2019 election campaign, trying to bank on “army, language, faith” and his support for “these heroes”. It cost him his presidency.

In reality, peoples’ frustration did not go away. Instead, there was a sense that now was not the time to destabilise the government because there was a war.

### How does Zelensky fit into this picture?

Over 40% of those who voted for Zelensky in 2019 did so as a protest vote against Poroshenko and his authoritarian fascicisation. Those who paint Ukrainians as Nazis should take note of this: even as the country was engaged in a war in which Russia said Ukraine was not a nation, Ukrainians did not want the right wing in government. But there is a right wing that waves certain types of flags and says we do not want any other ethnicities, and there is a right wing that supports neoliberal economic policies. Zelensky and his party, the Servant of the People, have bought into the neoliberal cult of deregulation and less state. While Zelensky is very popular today, what one forgets is that his ratings were going through the floor just before the invasion, because he was elected on popular slogans but did not deliver on any of them.

Deregulation does not work in peacetime, let alone in wartime. The state needs to step in. These free marketeers will need to learn fast and work hard to create a state that will ensure those who have paid the highest price in this war reap the greatest benefit from the rebuilding of the country they are fighting for. Otherwise, the government runs the risk that people will seek to finish what they did not finish in 2014 — but now with weapons in their hands. ■

# Hanna Perekhoda

## **‘The war in Donbas would not have started without Russia’s military intervention’<sup>4</sup>**

*Ukrainian socialist Hanna Perekhoda was born and raised in Donbas. She is currently a PhD candidate in history at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, where her research examines debates over the Ukrainian question among the Bolsheviks. Perekhoda answers questions from Federico Fuentes regarding Russia’s relationship with Ukraine, the role of language in the conflict and the realities of the Donbas region.*

On launching his invasion, Putin argued that Ukrainians do not exist, that the Ukrainian state was a mistake, and that he was simply taking back what was rightfully Russia’s. Could you briefly outline how the relationship between Russia and Ukraine has developed over time? How much has the nature of this relationship been a motivating factor in Putin’s war?

To understand the war that Putin is waging against Ukraine and its people, it is necessary to consider the self-perception and perception of the world that was forged within the Russian political class and the place they reserve for Ukraine in it. For Putin, Ukrainians and Russians are “one and the same people”, while the distinct national identity of Ukrainians is the result of a conspiracy plotted by those who want to weaken Russia. Tsarist elites also believed rival powers were fueling Ukrainian national sentiment to weaken Russia. Two centuries later, Putin expresses this same obsession, which shapes both his rhetoric and political action.

In fact, this is also the reason why Western observers were unable to believe that this current war could possibly happen. Why would Putin finally embark on a war on a scale not seen in Europe since the end of World War II if there was strictly no economic gain for him? Perhaps it is because the people who rule Russia are not *homo economicus* and do not calculate wins and losses in the manner that proponents of the

realist approach in international relations imagine.

As the well-known expression goes, “Russia did not have an empire, it was an empire”. Its colonies were neither geographically nor politically separated from the imperial core. Borders, both physical and symbolic, were therefore blurred. In such a context, how can one define the limits of the Russian nation? This difficult question has turned out to be fateful, as much for Russians, who are trying to figure out where their borders end, as for the peoples subjected to Russia’s deadly embrace. This war demonstrates how dangerous empires that want to become nation-states are. Control over Ukraine is a cornerstone of the project of the Russian Empire but also — and above all — of the project of the Russian Nation as formulated by its most prominent historians and intellectuals in the 19th century. I want to insist on this double role. Without Ukraine, Russia would never have become an imperial power and would cease to be a great state stretching across Europe and Asia. But, at the same time, for Russian nationalist elites, their nation is incomplete, if not impossible, without Ukrainians within it. As with Russian nationalists of previous eras, Putin sees the separate existence of Ukrainians as leading to an inevitable destruction of the body of the Russian nation. In this sense, the national narrative of Ukraine and of Russia are in total contradiction and mutually exclusive. Ukraine as a political community can only survive outside of Russia because Russia denies its right to exist.

Ever since the 19th century, Russian elites have developed a paradoxical attitude towards Ukraine. On the one hand, they take for granted that Ukrainians are an integral part of Russia; for them, Russian-Ukrainian relations are not a problem in themselves. On the other hand, both the tsarist and Soviet authorities, after their Stalinist turn, suppressed any manifestation of a separate Ukrainian political identity. They claimed that Ukrainian nationalism was a phenomenon limited to a few intellectuals but the massive nature of the threat posed by Ukrainian political identity was acknowledged because Ukrainian culture and language were consistently repressed. At times of crisis, as was the case in 1917 or in 1991, the sudden appearance of Ukrainians — who are not even supposed to exist! — with their separatist claims came as a shock for Russians. Suddenly, the “Ukrainian question” was seen as a matter of life and death for Russia. Confronted with Ukraine breaking away to forge its own destiny, Russia’s ruling classes were horrified and stunned at how quickly their world was falling apart. It turned out that their “one and the same people” was a product of their wishful thinking that had never existed anywhere other than in their imagination. In this sense, the current Russian war in Ukraine can be seen as an extreme manifestation of the struggle that Russian nationalists, attached to the idea of the “one and the same people”, are waging to reconnect with their past in order to gain a foothold in the



present and project themselves into the future.

But while I want to emphasise that history is important, it cannot fully explain the reasons for this invasion. Contrary to what Putin believes, history is not fate: Russian elites could have easily developed a different vision of their nation. History is a source of repertoires of practices and discourses that can be reactivated by ruling classes to pursue the political objectives of the moment. Just as Nazism was not the product of the German spirit, Putinism and his invasion of Ukraine is not the simple product of some historical inertia. The ideas of Putin and the Russian ruling classes may be a product of the past centuries, but Putin's political regime, which has enabled these ideas to be reactivated, is a product of the past twenty years.

**An often-repeated claim is that, since the Maidan rebellion in 2014, Russian-speakers have been discriminated against and the Russian language banned in Ukraine. How accurate are such statements?**

During the 20th century, and especially after the imperial turn of Stalinism, Russian became the dominant language in all areas of public life in the Soviet Union: economy, administration, culture, media, education. The colonial division of labour between the city and the countryside also persisted, guaranteeing urbanised Russian and Russified Soviet citizens a privileged social position along with access to income, skills, prestige and power in the peripheral republics. During this process, more and more Ukrainians abandoned their language and culture, which became markers of cultural inferiority that hindered social mobility. Soviet modernisation was accompanied by the strengthening of the dominant imperial culture, which in turn perpetuated significant structural inequalities between Russian and Ukrainian speakers. The post-Soviet Ukrainian elite has neither the will nor means to correct these structural deficiencies. Instead, their opportunist policies have largely sought to manipulate language identities, without putting into question the status quo.

From 2004 onwards, the various oligarchic clans in competition for power artificially fed the socio-linguistic divide to mobilise their respective electorates around questions of identity. In 2012, pro-Russian political forces passed a law to supposedly ensure the protection of minority languages. But their campaign sought to only “defend” the Russian language, which meant, as it quickly became clear, defence of Russian soft power in Ukraine. Russian-speaking Ukrainian culture, with its own history and identity separate from the Kremlin's political priorities, did not receive any substantial support. Instead, the pro-Putin, Russian imperialist and anti-Ukrainian discourse was given a blank cheque. When President Viktor Yanukovich was impeached in 2014, parliament tried to repeal the law. Although this decision was never ratified, Russia took the

opportunity to express concern about discrimination against Russians by what it called the “fascist junta” in Ukraine — an argument that was also used to justify Russian interference in Crimea and Donbas to “save the Russian speakers from genocide,” according to Moscow.

In 2018, parliament adopted a law requiring that Ukrainian be used in most aspects of public life and obliging state officials and public sector employees to speak Ukrainian when communicating with customers. This may seem surprising to people from Western Europe, where similar processes of linguistic homogenisation took place more than a century ago (and, let it be said, often in a much more violent form). But the situation of Ukraine, having obtained its independence only thirty years ago and having remained under Russian political and cultural domination until 2014, cannot be compared to that of nations that have had their own nation-state since at least the nineteenth century.

Now, faced with Russia’s invasion and the inhuman treatment of civilians by the occupying army, the inhabitants of the country feel themselves to be first and foremost Ukrainians, including those who speak Russian. People in Kherson are greeting Ukrainian soldiers and celebrating the liberation of the city, and in 99% of cases they do it in Russian. Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers defending their country are Russian speakers.

**From the outside, the impression we get is that Putin’s invasion has created a totally understandable hatred of all things Russian in Ukraine. How do you see this situation?**

Even before the war, Putin’s state claimed an absolute monopoly on Russian language and culture and considered use of the Russian language as being the same thing as identifying with Russia. Indeed, since the early 2000s, Russia has promoted the conception of the “Russian world”, relying on Russian speakers in neighbouring countries to carry out a special mission; one that, of course, they have not consented to. This mission consists of absolute loyalty to the Russian state and unconditional support for all the Kremlin’s decisions. The Putin state has used the medium of Russian culture to spread conservative, irredentist and Russian nationalist ideology among Russian speakers in neighbouring countries. But, if in the 2000s, the “Russian world” was above all a tool of soft power, from 2014 it became the engine of Russian military aggression, whose objective is to erase Ukraine from the world map.

Perhaps investing the imperial language and culture with a decolonial content could be an option for Ukrainian society. But such a scenario would only be possible once Russia stops imposing its power over the Russian language spoken by millions of

people who do not see themselves as sympathisers of Putin's political project. It is quite difficult to argue that Ukrainians "must be more tolerant" towards things associated with Russia when Russian political elites deny nothing less than the right of Ukrainians to exist and frequently make statements that can be considered as incitement to genocide. The inhabitants of Ukraine, independently of the language they speak and the culture they share, are currently subject to bombings, rape and murder, perpetuated not by Putin but by ordinary Russian soldiers. This will, of course, leave an open wound and a gap between the two peoples for years to come. A Ukrainian whose friends or family were killed by an ordinary Russian soldier will probably not be very receptive to the idea that "not all Russians are bad".

However, those of us Ukrainians who are not personally affected at the same level and are still capable of taking a critical distance and projecting ourselves into the future, must not perpetuate indiscriminate hatred. On the contrary, we are privileged enough to be capable of building bridges between Ukrainians and those Russians who want to be in solidarity with our fight against their state. I must admit that the necessary precondition is a will of these Russians to take responsibility for their own society and to have a minimum of humility. Even the most "open-minded" Ukrainians lose their patience when they see some Russian "fighters against the regime" who not only refuse to work on the transformation of their society but also do not give a damn about Ukrainian demands and priorities, presenting themselves instead as the main victims of this war.

We know of numerous representatives of the Russian and Belorussian political opposition, activists and intellectuals, who are now in Ukraine, contributing to its victory in different ways. The only problem they face is the bureaucratic Ukrainian state machine that prevents them from quickly obtaining a Ukrainian passport or any other form of legal status in the country. It is worth noting that Maksym Butkevich, an anarchist and human rights defender who helped Russian and Belorussian refugees in Ukraine, is now in Russian captivity. Most Ukrainians accept and respect Russians who are fighting on their side against Putin's regime.

You grew up in Donetsk. Could you give us a sense of what attitudes have been in the Donbas towards Ukraine and Russia since independence, and if they have shifted over time? What does the Donbas tell us about the failures of Ukrainian elites' attempts to cohere a unifying Ukrainian identity post-independence? How do you envisage the situation in the Donbas being resolved beyond the war?

The Donbas industrial region began to be actively populated only from the late

nineteenth century. Many, however, settled there even more recently, as the artificial famine of 1932–1933 depopulated rural areas. This second wave of migration after World War II saw people from all over the Soviet Union, but mostly from Russia, rush to Donbas for jobs in coal mining, one of the most prestigious and well-paid industries. During the 1980s, the accumulation of economic deficiencies in the Soviet economy and the threat of losing their privileged status led locals to support Ukrainian independence, hoping that Donbas would become the dominant region in the economy and politics of the country. However, as post-Soviet states fell prey to wild capitalism, the population lost even the symbolic privilege it felt it held from belonging to the vanguard of a Soviet nation and found themselves instead a minority inside a country whose culture was until then perceived as “backward”. Civil society was weak and the population radically paternalist and nostalgic for the glory days of the Soviet past.

This situation was fertile ground for local mafias who not only took over complete control of politics, the economy and the media in the region, but also sought to take over political power in Kyiv. They persuaded the local population that “the Donbas feeds Ukraine” and that it was exploited by western Ukrainians, despite the fact that, even in the years of crisis, wages were twice as high in Donbas as they were in western Ukraine. They did this to cover up the simple fact that it was actually locals – Yanukovych’s clan and allied oligarchs – who were their real exploiters. As a result, resentment, anti-Western discourse and demonisation of everything Ukrainian were used as means to divide and rule. But, in general, the identities of locals were relatively blurred, which is why they were easy prey for manipulation and political instrumentalisation. Donbas became increasingly isolated from the rest of the country politically, economically and culturally.

Starting in 2009, the Donbas mafia began running the country. The popular Maidan uprising of 2014 put their rule under threat. In response, Yanukovych and his clan provided key resources for the separatist movement in Donbas, hoping to at least preserve power over their stronghold. But even if the Donbas population had a sense of local exceptionalism, separatist desires were extremely marginal and there was minimal evidence of support for an armed uprising. Ambivalence and detachment were the most prominent sentiments among the population, 70% of whom were against anything that increased the threat of destabilisation in April 2014. That same month, amid a background of general apathy and disorientation, a Russian ex-FSB [Federal Security Service] officer Igor Girkin-Strelkov, together with several dozen armed people, began taking control of the local institutions, asking Moscow to send “volunteers” to sustain their “rebellion”.

Canadian historian David Marples has demonstrated in his research that, while

history and identity can be “baseline” factors, they are not enough in and of themselves to explain the outbreak of war. Existing tensions and grievances were manipulated for a long time by both Ukrainian and Russian elites, but it is unlikely that war in Donbas would have happened without Russian military intervention. Another key factor was the support given by local oligarchs, who tried to play both sides until they were replaced by Kremlin puppets.

The separatist republics in Donbas have become zones of corruption, total impunity, violence and widespread injustice, where the population faces uncertainty, extreme poverty, repression and physical abuse. Ukraine has repeatedly promoted the deployment of an international peacekeeping force to these territories. I think there is a chance that Donbas could one day return to a peaceful life. But in my opinion, this will only be possible after a complete withdrawal of Russian armed forces and subsequent demilitarisation of Russia. An economic and environmental reconstruction, along with the creation of the necessary conditions for democratic expression, could probably be achieved under a long-term international mandate of peacekeeping forces. ■

# Vitaliy Dudin

## ‘The future of demilitarisation lies in stopping Russia’s war machine now’<sup>5</sup>

*Social Movement chairperson Vitaliy Dudin discusses the initial scale of peoples’ resistance to Russia’s invasion, and key issues such as Ukraine’s far right, NATO and sending weapons to Ukraine, with Federico Fuentes.*

Could you give us an idea of the kinds of resistance — armed and unarmed — that Ukrainians have engaged in. What role is the left, such as Social Movement, and trade unions playing within the resistance?

Russia’s invasion has created a major threat to the existence of Ukraine as an independent state. Without doubt, we can say that the current war is the most devastating war we have seen [in Ukraine] since World War II.

Putin’s government has a lot of resources, but Ukrainian people are willing and ready to resist. Ukrainians have shown that they are willing to bravely fight back, even without modern weapons such as anti-aircraft systems, fighter jets and missiles. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) and the Territorial Defence (TD), which is integrated into the AFU. The AFU is currently fighting on the frontline with all the weapons available to it, whereas the TD mostly protects cities with guns. Some Social Movement activists, as well as many trade union members, have joined the TD as volunteers. It is worth mentioning that dozens of anarchists and socialists have formed their own unit within the TD, called the Resistance Committee.

A lot of leftists are also helping as volunteers to supply the army or satisfy people’s humanitarian needs. One of the most effective initiatives in this regard is Operation Solidarity, which has managed to provide supplies to the militant left. We are working to meet the needs of trade union members serving in the army. We have also worked with the nurses’ NGO Be Like Nina and helped them obtain medicines for hospitals

that are taking care of wounded soldiers.

We also see that a lot of people are protesting the invaders in occupied cities. We are not involved in such activity, but we support it. Of course, it is very dangerous because peaceful protests can be shot down by armed Russian soldiers. Such resistance proves that people are against the “liberation” that seeks to turn their cities into grey zones.

Lastly, we as Social Movement continue to act as a political organisation. We seek to counter Russian propaganda and call on our people to fight for a free and fair Ukraine.

[A lot of attention has been given to the Azov battalion and other neo-Nazi forces. Could you tell us about their real level of influence and the role they play? Are you concerned that the far right — in Ukraine and abroad — will come out stronger from this war, particularly the longer it drags on?](#)

I think that the role of the far-right has been overestimated. This has been shown up in the phantasmagorical way that Russia tried to justify its invasion and war crimes. Before February 24, Azov united about 1000 people who were located in Mariupol and did nothing, because they were integrated into the National Guard of Ukraine. After the Russian invasion, they have been treated as heroes due to their role in the defence of Mariupol, alongside AF units. This is a strange way to dismantle a far-right nationalist agenda, isn't it? Far-right militants have committed acts of violence on the streets, but can these actions be in any way compared to the mass killings that have resulted from the bombing and terror campaign carried out during the occupation?

Of course, they could become stronger, but if this occurs it would be the fault of Russia. Radical nationalists exist in Ukraine, in their specific niche, as in many other countries. Their activities pose a problem for Ukrainian society, but not for Russia or international peace. The far right in Ukraine was mainly tolerated because of the defence needs of the Ukrainian state. The government turned a blind eye to attacks by radical nationalists while they helped them meet their defence needs. These radical nationalists have played a role in protecting and serving the oligarchic elite and its regime. But their political influence is very small, and they mostly have a very limited role.

For now, the radical nationalists are playing a less important role than in the 2014 Maidan protests, because thousands of ordinary people are taking up arms. The more Ukrainians that have the necessary weapons to defend themselves — and the more the international left supports Ukraine — the less influence the far right will have in Ukraine.

The best way to neutralise the problem of radical nationalism in Ukraine is by

weakening Russia's imperialist intentions. Those who refuse to express solidarity with Ukraine because of the existence of radical nationalists have nothing in common with anti-war principles and ideas.

**Much has been made about the conflict in eastern Ukraine prior to the invasion. How has the invasion impacted on this conflict and, more generally, on relations between Ukrainian and Russian speakers in Ukraine?**

Putin's invasion has seriously damaged relations between Russian and Ukrainian people but, at the same time, it has brought about some kind of consolidation in Ukrainian society. After February 24, even people who had some political illusions regarding Russia's progressive role became convinced enemies of Moscow. We can say that this common tragedy has united people. People from the western part of Ukraine are willing to help refugees from the east and are showing their support.

At the same time, some people have pursued an exclusionary and extremist agenda, claiming that Russian speaking people are "agents of Putin". We know that Russian culture will be associated with the culture of the oppressors for a long time (until Putin's regime is overthrown by Russian citizens). But we are ready to oppose any sort of linguistic or cultural discrimination and hope that solidarity will prevail.

We have also seen that ordinary people in the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas are tired of being used by Moscow in the war against Ukrainians. Of course, most of them consider Russian as their native language, but they do not wish to give up their lives either. Even amid this horrible story, the potential for reintegration remains.

**Given where things are at, some believe that the best possible outcome is for Ukraine to negotiate and give up its ambitions to join NATO. How would you respond to those who argue this? More broadly, how do Social Movement view the issue of NATO and its role in this war?**

First of all, we think that any intention of joining NATO cannot justify Russian invasion. This is an issue that lies in the field of domestic debate and national sovereignty.

Second, we view NATO as a club of the richest countries and their close allies. For Ukraine, it would be better to develop relations with all countries and ensure real independence.

Third, it is important to realise how the issue of NATO has impacted Ukrainian political life. The perspective of membership was very vague — NATO has never guaranteed membership for Ukraine. So, an "Atlantic orientation" was always more a case of wishful thinking on the part of the government, while for the people it was a reaction to the collective trauma and fear of war in 2014. NATO could have offered



Ukraine membership a long time ago, but instead it promised some kind of cooperation, which only made Ukraine vulnerable. We believe NATO has played the role of a passive spectator in this war. It seems as if they are more interested in assessing the strength of the Russian army.

Debates have occurred over the issue of sending weapons to Ukraine, with some opposing this saying it will only contribute to the remilitarisation of Europe and empowerment of NATO. Others say it will lead to a scenario like Afghanistan in the 1980s, with Ukrainians being used to obtain the US' goal of undermining Russia. What is Social Movement's position on this question?

I see no reason for such a debate. The future of demilitarisation lies in stopping Russia's war machine now. Issues of security should be of strong concern. Any demilitarisation that ignores the security of the people, their right to defend themselves, and justifies blocking resistance against imperialist aggression is morally wrong. Ukraine needs weapons to defend itself and the rest of Europe. We need anti-aircraft weapons and jets to protect civilians, because people are dying from missiles and airstrikes. I want to stress that such weapons will not change the nature of war: they won't enable Ukraine's army to eliminate enemies far away but rather enhance their fire-power in close combat.

The more Russian military units that are destroyed, the more stable a peace we will get. It is simple, like during the war against the Third Reich. Russia also justifies its aggression with an ideology of ethno-nationalism. It's a strong and real threat that needs to be addressed.

It is also important to know that a lot of Ukrainian workers are joining the army. We should arm them, so that they can return to their homes alive and be empowered to continue the class war against greedy oligarchs.

Beyond the question of arms, what kind of solidarity do you believe is required to ensure genuine peace for Ukraine?

We ask that everyone put pressure on their governments to ensure debt cancellation and provide unconditional financial aid for rebuilding Ukraine, as part of a so-called "New Marshall Plan". You can also help us by sending any type of aid (including medikits, bulletproof vests, helmets).

But the most specific thing leftists can do is to fundamentally shift their organisation's analysis of the war. They should not tolerate Putin's imperialism and should fully support the right of Ukrainian people to self-determination. ■

# **Vladyslav Starodubtsev**

## **‘The war has revolutionised politics in Ukraine’<sup>6</sup>**

*Social Movement activist Vladyslav Starodubtsev discusses with Federico Fuentes the general mood in Ukraine regarding negotiations, NATO, the EU and Ukraine’s reconstruction, and what the war has meant for progressive forces in the country.*

There have been increasing calls from outside Ukraine in favour of negotiations as a means to halt the further loss of lives. Those demanding negotiations often argue it is the United States, Britain, NATO or some other foreign power that is pressuring Ukraine not to negotiate because they would prefer the war to continue to weaken Russia. How do you respond to this?

I would say that, in reality, the situation is the complete opposite. The United States, Britain, France, all of them have been prepared to sell out Ukraine from the start. Even before the war, they made it clear that they did not want to support Ukraine and viewed it as a lost cause. It is well known that in the days prior to the war, these powers were speaking with Zelensky. People in power like [French president Emmanuel] Macron, [German chancellor Olaf] Scholz, were asking Zelensky to negotiate, to come to some sort of agreement in which Ukraine gave something to Putin. They also told him US intelligence suggested Russia would be in Kyiv within two days of launching an invasion and that the best solution was for Zelensky to leave the country and prepare for partisan warfare once the occupation was completed. As you can see, this is not how things turned out.

This has put Western powers in an awkward position: not only did they not expect this but, at home, they have faced pressure from their own population who rightly believe Ukraine should be supported. Western powers have been the main proponents of negotiations, not Ukrainians. Ukrainians feel a very justifiable anger towards these imperialist powers that have been pushing us to make peace with the occupiers. That

is why I say the situation is the opposite of what those people claim: the imperialist powers have been pushing Ukraine to sell out its people.

This policy of appeasement will only help strengthen the existing world order, in which the rule of the strongest is enforced and where the countries with the largest armies rule the world, rather than the world order being decided by democratic means. Peace negotiation in Ukraine would motivate other states to carry out similar aggressions, carry out similar genocidal actions, because, in the end, they know that they can negotiate something for themselves out of it.

Such claims represent a colonial way of speaking about Ukrainians, who do not want to be occupied and do not want to give any land to the enemy. After the brutal massacres in Bucha, in Irpin, no Ukrainian is even contemplating the possibility of negotiations. So much so that I would say that now, a lot of people are not only fighting for the restoration of the 2014 borders but for the destruction of the Russian regime. This is the general mood. When people hear someone talking about negotiating peace, they get very angry.

### What impact has all this had on Ukrainian attitudes towards NATO?

It is interesting because Ukrainian people now simultaneously really love NATO and really hate NATO. Before the war, NATO told Putin that Ukraine would never be allowed to join. This was once again confirmed by Scholz in a recent interview, where he said he told Putin exactly this. Many view this statement as giving Putin a green light to invade — which it was — because in the face of a real possibility of war, NATO just compromised and sought to appease Putin as much as possible. Because of this, people really hate NATO. They feel that NATO only wants to pursue its own interest. At the same time, a lot of people understand that if Ukraine had been in NATO in 2014, none of this would have happened. All this creates a very strange discussion around NATO: some people idealise NATO and, at the same time, hate NATO.

But I do not think Ukrainian people will need NATO if we win this war and the Russian regime collapses. The question of NATO is not as important today as it was before the war, when the general concern driving support for NATO was to stop Russian aggression. This worst fear has now come true, so joining NATO is not so much a major issue now.

### What can you tell us about life in Russian-occupied Ukraine?

The situation in the occupied regions is one of occupation — it is a fascist occupation. This means repression, mass killings, holding the families of political activists hostage, repression against the LGBTIQ+ community. It is a terror state where anyone who

carries out political activity is brutally repressed. A lot of trade unions have been destroyed or forced to accept new labour contracts that are much worse than Ukrainian labour contracts, and all strikes are banned. A lot of ordinary people just went missing: they left home and never returned. There is also a lot of open looting and rapes carried out by Russian force. The conditions are very dire.

In the occupied territories, Russian authorities have been pushing radical policies of assimilation. They have practically banned the use of the Ukrainian language and enforced the Russian language everywhere, including in schools and public administration. From September 1 [2022], when the school semester starts, the Ukrainian language will no longer be taught at any school in the occupied regions: no studying Ukrainian, no Ukrainian literature, not even within the subject of foreign literature. Russian authorities are inviting people, such as teachers and political commissars, from Russia to come to the occupied regions and take over positions in the education system and public administration. There is very clearly a forced assimilation drive under way to make everyone Russian. Conditions are awful: it's a fascist occupation.

**How do Social Movement comrades believe the situation should be resolved in the Donbas region, given the fears some hold that a withdrawal of Russian troops could leave citizens in the Donbas subject to repression from Ukrainian forces?**

First, I do not believe the situation for people in the Donbas could be any worse than it is now; that is not possible, as what they have now is an authoritarian state that relies completely on repression and where all conditions for dialogue are closed off. The people of the Donbas will be better off under any process of reintegration compared to their existing situation.

Second, I do not believe there is any generalised sense of hatred towards people in the Donbas. Of course, there will be a need to bring to justice those people who helped foment this state of terror in the Donbas and participated in the war against Ukraine. But even so, I see a desire on the part of the Ukrainian government to compromise on certain issues. I don't believe there will be some kind of wave of generalised repression.

That said, reintegration will not be an easy process. For eight years, people in the Donbas have been living very different lives. People there have been living in a state where political discussion and action has been completely prohibited. The political culture in Donbas, compared to generally in Ukraine, is very different now. You also have the people who were forced to flee from the Donbas and left their homes and their previous lives. Then you have the situation of Ukrainians who stayed in the

Donbas and have been treated as lower class people, while Russians were privileged. Some time will be needed for people to understand how to live together again after such a long period of living such starkly different realities.

There will be complex issues that need to be resolved too, such as the issue of language. It will not be easy to reconcile all of these and it will take time. But there has been no indication from the government that they are looking to repress the people living in Donbas. And I do not think there are any issues that cannot be overcome, especially if social support is provided to people and the population is allowed to participate in the dialogue.

Despite the war, Ukraine's parliament has continued to consider legislation, some of which has been progressive (for example, on the Istanbul Convention against domestic violence and equal marriage rights) and some reactionary (such as the anti-labour laws). What assessment does Social Movement make of the Zelensky government?

Even before the war, this has been one of the most popular governments Ukraine has had — which is not saying anything good about it, it was just not as awful as the previous ones. Zelensky's party, Servant of the People, has become the most progressive party in parliament on social issues such as LGBTQ rights, opposing violence against women, and so on. But most of these policies have been promoted with European integration in mind, and not because the party is itself progressive.

On the economic front, Zelensky's party is absolutely neoliberal; it has a market fundamentalist orientation. And this war has provided it with the opportunity of a lifetime to push through every unpopular legislation they have ever dreamed of. The war has given them *carte blanche* to do whatever they want. For example, they have adopted completely neoliberal legislation to deregulate labour relations, which has weakened the power of collective labour contracts and trade unions. Due to their market fundamentalist outlook, they view trade unions and any form of economic democracy as harmful to economic development and see a need to destroy unions. They are now realising this dream.

They have also adopted tax reform and are pushing for another round of tax reform, which they refer to as “10-10-10”, and which would set tax rates at 10% for income tax, 10% for company tax and 10% for goods and services tax. It would be impossible to finance anything on the basis of such a taxation system, especially in times of war, so the end result will be no health care, no social services, no education, no public transport, no military industry.

The Zelensky government has also passed laws to promote privatisation in the

middle of the war. This runs contrary to what almost every wartime government has ever done, which is to centralise the economy and mobilise the people to produce what is needed to win the war. For example, during World War II, there was a coalition government in Britain involving different parties that worked together to pursue a social vision. They even let Labour into the government and let workers play a role in their factories. The bourgeoisie at the time understood they needed to compromise with workers in times of war, because they needed social peace and social stability. This was crucial to the war effort. So, workers mobilised and produced as many weapons as they could. But our government thinks that there is no need to produce any weapons because the West will give us everything we need. In wartime, factories producing military equipment are being closed, under financed or privatised, and workers are being fired.

Our government is completely sabotaging the war effort: it has decided not to nationalise the economy, instead it has destroyed the war economy and decided to continue with its neoliberal, oligarchical pro-business agenda. They are not orientating Ukraine's economy to meet the needs of the people or to produce military equipment. They are using the war to impose their libertarian and market fundamentalist vision of the economy. They are pushing hard to entrench privileges for business, making use of the fact that trade unions and the media cannot do anything because of the war. In this regard, they are absolutely sabotaging the war effort.

**I imagine this also applies to Zelensky's vision for Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. Or has there been significant push back on this?**

Yes, the same is true for post-war reconstruction. The Zelensky government is pushing for the most neoliberal reconstruction possible. It wants to create a kind of "Wild West" neoliberal economy and sell off as much of Ukraine to the West as it can. This, of course, is an awful scenario.

Unfortunately, there is currently no real public discussion on alternative proposals for reconstruction. We, as Social Movement, are strongly promoting our vision for a socially progressive reconstruction. A lot of people in Ukraine don't understand what the difference is, but when you explain it to them, they get on board with the idea of a social reconstruction. But there is a lot of work to be done, because at the moment the government has monopolised this discussion. Given the media is completely focused on the war, it's very hard to even start this discussion.

Ironically, at the moment, it is the West saying to the Ukrainian government that it is being too radical in its economic measures and that it should consider some more Keynesian measures and implement certain social policies. They are saying: "Even by

our standards you are absolutely awful”.

This is a big challenge, and we need to have a big discussion. We are working on this issue as it's absolutely crucial. That is one of the reasons we need to pressure the Ukrainian government on social issues, such as with the campaign around the anti-labour laws, because if we do not, we will end up with a very neoliberal reconstruction, where the sole focus is on the wellbeing of the most privileged.

[In light of your comments regarding how some Western countries view Zelensky's policies, how does Social Movement view the European Union's offer of membership to Ukraine? And what position does Social Movement have towards EU membership?](#)

Most of the left in Ukraine is supportive of European integration. We understand all the problems associated with the European Union and its neoliberal policies. In fact, Ukraine has already suffered the negative consequences of the European Union Association Agreement and trade agreements, which led to the removal of protectionist measures for Ukrainian businesses and state corporations and resulted in the collapse of our trade. In that sense, Ukraine has already experienced the worst aspects of the European Union; what we have not yet experienced is its good elements.

For example, the European Union has a lot stronger labour protections and rights compared to what currently exists in Ukraine. It also has a lot more socially progressive policies that Ukrainians would benefit from through integration into the European Union. So, I would not say that European Union integration will necessarily harm the possibilities for Ukraine to reform in a more progressive direction, as the European Union is a lot more progressive than Ukraine is at the moment: membership would actually be a barrier to our ruling class adopting some of its most reactionary policies.

Moreover, by integrating into the European Union, Ukraine — as the largest country in Europe geographically — would be able to participate in the politics of the union. Currently, all decisions are being adopted somewhere else, without any consultation with us. Integration will create a new space for doing politics and we, as the left, will try to use this space. I think Ukrainian membership could be very important for the future of the European Union too, as it will have to change its policies to facilitate Ukraine's entry. This, in turn, will create possibilities for reimagining another Europe and developing socially progressive, even socialist, alternatives to the neoliberal project of the European Union.

For example, we know that there are negatives to EU membership, such as the law on competition. We also know that if Ukraine wins this war, we will need to rebuild the country. But any reconstruction will be impossible if we have to introduce competition

laws that prohibit state investment in infrastructure, in production, in job security. We need to start fighting now for European integration on the basis of special conditions to allow Ukraine to carry out a social reconstruction.

But we should be very clear: the European Union does not want to accept Ukraine. They have been constantly creating new barriers to Ukraine's entry, because they absolutely do not want to spend more money and time in integrating us. They have already established their power relations when it comes to Ukraine and want it to stay that way. All of Europe's privileged classes are fighting against Ukrainian integration. The European bureaucracy will oppose any integration of Ukraine, with or without special conditions. They will continue to invent new, imaginative barriers and enforce new conditions to keep Ukraine out. And if Ukraine is adopted, they will seek to exploit Ukraine as much as possible and offer as few compromises as possible. They are already doing this, saying you can only join on this or that condition. But we can point to the example of the Danish people who joined the European Union with a lot of special conditions. Such conditions should be granted to Ukraine for its reconstruction to allow it to rebuild a social state after the war.

**Social Movement was started to provide an alternative for Ukrainian working people to oligarchical politics. How has the war — and the mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians to meet the Russian threat — affected the pre-existing Ukrainian political routine? What opportunities, if any, is it opening for Social Movement?**

The war has changed Ukrainian politics dramatically. There is a quote from Franz Fanon regarding how situations of war and revolution create a sense among people that they can govern themselves due to finding themselves in the situation of having to organise collectively to fight against their oppressor. This is what we are seeing in Ukraine: people are organising themselves as volunteers in the army, in the factories, everywhere, all of which has built a strong sense of solidarity and cooperation among society. People have found new ways to cooperate, new ways to organise, and they feel a lot more empowered. They understand that it is them who are at the forefront of this war effort, not the ruling class, and that without them there would be nothing. This has revolutionised politics and I think this will translate into more popular activity after the war, because this feeling will not disappear just because the war ends.

Another effect the war has had is that the social bases of existing Ukrainian political parties have collapsed. Before the war, you had mostly pro-Russian and pro-European parties. Now, there is no such divide. Parties will need to find new issues and new ways to win over voters and get elected. A lot of new discussions will arise; people will not



just be talking about the same old pro-Europe/pro-Russia divide.

I would also say that, with the war, a lot more people have become sceptical of the idea of the West and of neoliberalism. Generally, before the war, many people would say: “The West is so great, we need to be like the West” and they supported policies that were adopted in Germany or the United States. But now, especially with all this drive for compromises with Russia and seeing that Europe is not really helping Ukraine, people are losing faith in the European world. People now view them as traitors who are not helping us to win our just war of national liberation. They say: “Why should we follow them, we don’t want to be like them.”

The left has also become a lot stronger and more accepted as a result of the war. When the Maidan revolution happened and the war started in the Donbas in 2014, the left was generally viewed as traitors, because we had, unfortunately, a lot of Stalinist, pro-Russian leftists and no strong anti-imperialist left: the left was viewed just as people who supported or wanted to compromise with Russian imperialism. Now that Social Movement, as well as other left organisations — anarchists, socialists, social democrats — are all participating in the war effort, this argument has collapsed and people are now saying: “OK, the left are for Ukrainians, they support us and worry about our problems. They are with the people and not against the people.” This has created a very good environment for building support for left-wing politics and developing a left-wing political subject, which does not currently exist because of the failures of the left to support the people around Maidan and the war in 2014. Now, everything has changed and people, even those with a nationalist outlook, have become a lot more open to the left.

**Western leftists are often uneasy about supporting Ukraine due to their own government’s stated support for Ukraine? What are some demands leftists in Western imperialist countries could be placing on their governments? How can leftists in Western imperialist countries offer practical solidarity to Ukrainian people?**

First, the Western left should continue pressuring their government to support Ukraine, because it is in the interest of their governments to sell out Ukraine. They do not want any of these problems created by Putin’s invasion of Ukraine; they want to continue business as usual with Putin. They want Russia’s gas, they want new contracts, new trade deals, they want to appease their capitalists. Because of this, they want to backtrack on their stated support for Ukraine. The left should be mobilising on the streets to pressure them to continue supporting Ukraine. The left should be the ones saying: “If you won’t help Ukraine, then we will oppose you and we will be the ones who stand up

for Ukraine to demand more support”. We, as the left, need to fight for a more democratic world, not a world based on military invasions and the imposition of the will of the strongest.

The left should also continue fighting to accept all refugees. They can use the exception that Ukraine’s situation has created to say: “OK, we have this situation in Ukraine. But we have similar situations all around the world: What’s the difference with Syria? What’s the difference with Palestine? With any country that is undergoing conflict, war, repressions, occupation? Why should Ukraine be made into an exception?” The treatment of Ukrainian refugees should be raised as a basis for arguing that all refugees should be supported. The conflict in Ukraine has shown up the racism of most Western governments and this needs to be highlighted.

Then there is the question of sanctions. If stronger sanctions are not imposed on Russia, then there will be many more deaths, many more refugees, much more social collapse, much more hunger. We need to sanction Russia so that it cannot afford to pay for soldier’s wages or more military equipment. If they cannot do this, then the war will stop. We need to continue pushing for sanctions.

The left should also campaign against the neoliberal actions of our government, for example the anti-labour reforms, because the left needs to not only fight against imperialism but for its vision of a post-war future, and not just for Ukraine. If Ukraine wins — and I hope it will — this will lead to a reshaping of the existing world order, particularly if the Russian regime collapses. Think about it: we will need to rebuild our country, and to do that we will need to reform the European Union. Moreover, we will need to do something about Russia. There will need to be a discussion regarding what any new economic and security architecture should look like and how it should deal with similar problems in the future, as well as problems such as debt.

All of this will create opportunities for pushing for a socially progressive vision for this new world order. And this needs to start in Ukraine — and now — by speaking out about all of these problems, such as debt, reconstruction, etc, because the world’s eyes are currently on Ukraine. If Ukraine is reconstructed along neoliberal lines, then the ruling classes will use this model to propagate the adoption of similar policies in their own countries. But if Ukraine is rebuilt along social lines, it sets a precedent. So, this is a very important fight.

There is also the question of international political structures, such as the United Nations. The fact that this war happened demonstrates something is wrong with the existing structures. The left needs to think through what a democratic world order could look like. Not a world order based on compromises between imperialists at the expense of smaller nations, but one where the difference between major powers and

smaller state is greatly diminished; where countries such as Ukraine, the Baltic states, Taiwan are given a voice and have a democratic way to protect themselves from the influence of imperialist powers. This discussion needs to start now.

Lastly, anyone on the left can come here to provide direct support and aid. Ukraine is a very poor country; its army is very underorganised and underdeveloped, so any aid is greatly appreciated. There have been several good examples of trade union convoys that the left has organised to provide solidarity and aid to workers fighting on the front line. Supporting Ukrainian workers in this fight is a very leftist thing to do and a lot more people should be doing this. Perhaps the most radical way to support Ukraine is to come here to fight. A lot of people talk about the Azov battalion, but if there was just one battalion made up of international left volunteers, no one would be talking about Azov; instead everyone would be talking about them and how the left supports Ukraine.

Unfortunately, little of this has happened due to the racism and unjust attitudes of many on the left towards Ukrainians, who they view as all being Nazis or “puppets of NATO”. By always talking about Azov while never providing any support, the left in the West only helps promote the idea that the left is against Ukraine and that only right-wingers are helping Ukraine, which is absolute nonsense.

Overall, the left needs to rethink itself and create practical solidarity with the people, rather than try to speak over others, as is the general tendency on the left. In Ukraine, this situation has been a big challenge for us; a challenge to see how the left can re-imagine itself and do the things that the left should be doing: fight for the emancipation of people and build international solidarity. But this war has also created a lot of possibilities for the left, in Ukraine and internationally. For example, we are talking with each other even though we are thousands of kilometres away. This would never have happened without this war. All this helps create new connections and new possibilities for a new kind of international solidarity. These possibilities should be developed, and I hope they will. ■

# Nataliya Levytska

## **‘Please stand with Ukrainian trade unionists and help us win this war’<sup>7</sup>**

*Nataliya Levytska is deputy chairperson of the Independent Mineworkers Union of Ukraine and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU). Levytska spoke to Chloe DS about the situation of Ukrainian trade unions and their dual fight against Russia’s invasion and the Ukrainian government’s anti-labour policies.*

### **What can you tell us about the trade union movement in Ukraine?**

I represent the KVPU, which is the second-largest union confederation in Ukraine. The KVPU was established at the time of Ukraine’s independence, but its first affiliates were established during the miners’ strikes that occurred during the times of the Soviet Union [in the late 1980s].

The Ukrainian trade union movement united about six million workers. But now, due to the war, this number has decreased because Russia has destroyed enterprises and infrastructure, resulting in the loss of workplaces. Russia has also destroyed residential buildings and hospitals and imposed a reign of terror in the occupied territories, forcing people to flee and become refugees.

Prior to the invasion, Ukrainian trade unions fought for wage increases and better working conditions and demanded the implementation of international labour standards. We confronted several attempts to undermine workers’ and union rights. Thanks to campaigns, protest actions and negotiations with the government, we stopped those attacks.

The KVPU and its affiliated organisations use different tools to defend workers’ rights, including protests, work-to-rule actions, collective bargaining and submitting lawsuits. Even now, during the war, we have won cases in courts. [In October 2022], the Supreme Court of Ukraine ruled in favour of a Wizz Air union member in an illegal dismissal case. However, due to the war, we are limited in our options. For

example, we can campaign, but we cannot hold protest actions.

### How has Russia's invasion impacted on Ukraine's trade union movement?

The KVPU has been affected by Russia's war ever since 2014. We have had cases where our union leaders have been kidnapped and tortured by Russian-backed separatists. Our unions were prohibited in the separatist areas. We have also had the experience of working with internally displaced people (IDPs) and helping members serving in the Ukrainian army. Despite this, since 2014, we have continued to help affiliated unions carry out their usual activities to protect workers' rights.

Now, Russia's full-scale invasion has ruined our cities and villages, killed people and brought terror to our country. Trade unions face new challenges, including risks to members' life, displacement, loss of homes, jobs and incomes, sexual violence and torture and risks of human trafficking. Ukrainian children have been illegally taken to the Russian Federation and our members have requested help because they don't know how to get them back.

The scale of our tasks is huge. Since the first days of the invasion, the KVPU has been helping to evacuate people, delivering humanitarian aid, delivering medicine and equipment to hospitals, helping IDPs, and providing aid to members who are serving in the Ukrainian armed forces. Now, one of the priorities of the KVPU is to prepare for the cold season because Russian forces are hitting energy targets and infrastructure to cause blackouts and cut off water, gas and heating supplies.

We are grateful to International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) members and partners, such as Solidarity Center and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, for their aid which has made it possible to deliver power banks, warm clothes, heaters and necessary goods to our members, medics and civilians in the regions. The risk of large-scale blackouts in Ukraine during the winter season is high. Even now, in Kyiv, we live and work with electricity outages. Just imagine only being able to prepare food, take a shower, work and have internet access at certain times when an electricity supply is available.

### What can you tell us about the anti-union laws being pushed by the Zelensky government?

Ukrainian trade unions are opposed to the laws and draft laws that undermine workers and trade union rights that are being pushed by representatives of the main parliamentary party. We have campaigned against labour reforms being carried out without effective social dialogue.

We have insisted that any significant changes to legislation must be made in

consultation with social partners, and at a time when workers can access information about this dialogue. Currently, workers don't have proper access to electricity to read or watch the news and follow these changes. Their voices must be heard. Ukrainian trade unions have insisted on the importance of ensuring legislation is in compliance with international labour standards, including the Directives of the European Union.

### What is the trade union movement's perspective on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine?

The post-war reconstruction of Ukraine must be inclusive and must seek to build an economy based on decent and green jobs. Trade unions, as representatives of workers, should be involved in the process of developing a plan for the rebuilding of Ukraine. People have paid a huge price for freedom and peace. We are under no illusions that the rebuilding process will be easy. All social parties should cooperate and work hard to ensure a better future for our children.

### How much influence does the far-right have in Ukraine?

People in Ukraine are united behind the need to protect Ukraine. Ukrainians want to live in peace and protect our country. This stance is not influenced by any particular groups, because Ukraine is a very democratic country and Ukrainian people support our country. It is not true to say that Ukraine is fascist, that is Russian propaganda. Ukraine is a country where peaceful people live, people who want to live in peace in our own country.

### What can you tell us about the campaign initiated by Ukrainian and Polish unions to expel the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) from the ITUC?

The Russian Federation continues to destroy Ukraine and commit genocide against its population, using rocket strikes and bombs prohibited by international law. It continues to implement a reign of terror in the occupied territories, creating concentration camps and deporting the population, including children, to Russia. It is destroying infrastructure and energy facilities with the aim of leaving millions of Ukrainian residents without water, electricity and heat during the cold season.

Russia is committing the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. In addition, the Russian regime is provoking an economic, food and energy crisis in the world with its war in Ukraine, and undermining achievements made in the global fight against climate change and for the promotion of democracy.

FNPR, as a trade union that supports the war and the criminal actions and policies of the Russian authorities both in terms of spreading information and through its actions in the occupied territories, cannot remain a member of the ITUC.

### What can the trade union movement internationally do to support Ukraine?

We appreciate all kinds of support from our brothers and sisters, from donations and humanitarian aid, to spreading information about the war in Ukraine in their countries. We will still need aid in winter: generators, power banks, medicine, food, warm clothes, sleeping bags, etc. Our refugees cannot go back home because their homes have been destroyed and their cities are under missile attacks or occupied by Russians. Moreover, people, in particular women with children and people with disabilities, have to go abroad because blackouts pose risks to their lives.

We ask that trade unions explain to their members that the war in Ukraine has had a devastating impact on people worldwide. It has caused an energy, economic, ecological and migrant crisis and worsened the situation of inflation. It has undermined achievements in fighting food insecurity and climate change, as well as with regards to gender gaps and energy poverty. The people of Ukraine are fighting for their freedom, democracy and peace. Ukrainians have given their lives not only for their land but for a better future for the world.

### Any final comments that you would like to end on?

Please stand with Ukraine and help us win this war. Please stand with all those who fight against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, injustice and the violation of rights. We should fight for a better world and to ensure that there will never again be wars, genocides and crimes against humanity. ■

# Viktoriia Pihul

## ‘Feminism is about fighting for our rights and our self-determination’<sup>8</sup>

*Viktoriia Pihul, a Ukrainian feminist and initiator with other feminists of the manifesto “The Right to Resist”<sup>9</sup>, explains to Dick Nichols how Ukraine’s women are organising and fighting back in the appalling conditions created by Putin’s war. Emphases in the text are by Pihul.*

**How is the feminist movement trying to best cope and help with the present disaster? What are its priorities?**

The war we now live through has affected and changed every aspect of our lives. The occupiers are working, among other things, to demoralise the population. That is why they use all means, including violence. At this very moment we need to understand that rape is a way of showing power and control over a situation, not a desire for sexual contact.

Of course, the work of feminist organisations under these conditions has changed considerably. Before the war, feminists and those who fought with us for women’s rights and visibility did a very large part of the educational work: educational courses, programs and events; organising actions, marches, etc. *Now this work is being transformed and assistance is primarily focused on survival and humanitarian support:* finding humanitarian aid, medicines for trans representatives, creating shelters, helping women with children to find or provide babysitting services. Social Movement, for example, collects humanitarian aid for women and children from trade unions. Organisations with which we have friendly relations, like Femsolution, Feminist Lodge and Bilkis, now do likewise.

This is a contradictory moment: on the one hand, the feminist movement is getting closer to women, hearing their voices. *The good point for women’s rights is that women lead and are more engaged in community humanitarian efforts.* It provides opportunities



for humanitarian actors to seek women's participation and guidance. I think that it is very important to focus on this: *women are involved in very important processes that allow Ukrainians to live and survive in the rearguard*. On the other hand, many of the problems that the movement has worked on for years risk becoming "not now" issues. And what women are now doing to help win may be overlooked in public discourse. Because all attention is now focused on military operations and men's role, and the female contribution at the front will be less noticeable as well. That is, the inequality in the representation of female and male roles does not disappear during the war, but rather increases.

I see potential spaces for feminist work as grassroots activism and work with women to build cohesion, awareness of our visibility, and further struggle for women's political participation. For example, gender quotas, the work of gender commissioners, the promotion and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which was ratified in June 2022 in Ukraine, working with the problem of domestic violence, the creation of shelters for women. *All this can be realised when women want to represent their interests and fight the stereotype that in politics everything is done by a few great people, and they do not decide anything.*

Olena Zelenskaya (Ukraine's "First Lady") has said: "Our resistance, as our future victory, has taken on a particularly feminine face. Women are fighting in the army, they are signed up to territorial defence [units], they are the foundation of a powerful volunteer movement to supply, deliver, feed ... they give birth in shelters, save their children and look after others' children, they keep the economy going, they go abroad to seek help. Others are simply doing their jobs, in hospitals, pharmacies, shops, transport, public services ... so that life continues." How accurate is this picture of women's engagement in the fight against the Russian invasion?

In this context I want to underline that gender roles are now changing in Ukraine. *Women on the home front have a war going on, too, which is just as important.*

Zelenskaya's words really reflect what I have seen in these months of war. With many people becoming unemployed and primarily men joining the Armed Forces of Ukraine, women are taking on new roles and multiple jobs to make up for the lost family income. Many women, forced to leave their homes and possessions behind, find themselves needing to buy household necessities all over again in a new place. By the way, the state has provided one-time assistance of 6500 hryvnia (€220) to Ukrainians, but this is very little taking inflation into account.

At the same time, women are now spending more and more time with children, as

they are on distance education. Women very often decide to stay in the occupied territories to care for the elderly parents or others. Or they are afraid of losing their sources of income. Thus, they are increasingly at risk of violence, both from the Russians and domestic psychological abuse. All this creates an additional burden and requires a lot of effort on the part of women. *I want to emphasise that they often take their work and their contribution to the resistance for granted.* It is our task as feminists to support women, to recognise their needs and to help in any way we can. The most important thing is not to let the female face of war remain in the shadows.

### How important for the overall morale of the resistance against the Russian invasion has the big increase in women's participation in the army and volunteer organisations been?

From the very first, we were all on adrenaline, taking on all kinds of things: volunteering, searching for ammunition, humanitarian aid, transporting people out of dangerous areas. With time, of course, this phase is replaced by immersion in trauma and helplessness.

But I hear and see in the public space women saying, *"We have no right to give up."* As I said, women have begun to band together locally to help. They weave camouflage nets, cook food for the military, pack and ship humanitarian aid. This promotes cohesion, so women feel they are not alone in their grief. It seems to me that even psychologically there is a certain support in this that we hold on to. *Now voluntary work has become not something from the world of activists, but something close and understandable to almost everyone.*

As for women's participation in the army, I immediately remember our "Ptitsa" (that's "bird" in Ukrainian) from Azovstal. This girl Katya defended Azovstal in Mariupol until her last day. She sang songs and said she would fight to the last. Her photo and video of her singing went viral on all social networks. She became one of the symbols of the defence of Mariupol.

*Now 35,000 women serve in the Ukrainian military, 1000 of them are commanders, and two are generals.* It is important that women also went from the first day of the war into the Territorial Defence. Now there is more talk about women's participation in the army, and they are becoming an example for all of us who are on the home front.

Regarding attitudes in the Ukrainian army, Hromadske International noted in 2014: "To be honest there's nothing to celebrate yet as the changes are very slow. In the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces you can hear the phrase 'my dear', so the army needs to be reformed starting with them. Many don't understand that significant changes will only take place after more than one generation."

That comment would seem to be confirmed by the army celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of Ukrainian Independence, which saw women soldiers marching in high heels. Is the seriousness of the resistance struggle against the Russian invasion helping put an end to this sort of sexist nonsense?

Sexism and inequality are still present in the army. In 2014, women who were, for example, snipers or artillerymen, were written in the employment record book as “communications officer” or something similar, and they received less money. In eight years, the situation has changed, but globally the problems remain. For example, *at the beginning of the full-scale war women were issued with men’s flak jackets and shoes, which are often larger in size, because there were no small ones. Women’s body armour is also very different, but there was none.* So too with hygiene items: pads, shampoos, mosquito repellent and even hairpins. I want to mention the volunteer initiative Zemliachky: they are very supportive of women who serve and do humanitarian aid for women who are fighting, given their special needs.

As to public stereotyping, I want to share one case that left a bad impression on not only the feminist movement, but also most people who do not belong to it. A Ukrainian stand-up comedian at the end of May (when it was three months into the war) “joked” as follows: “Can you imagine what a women’s battalion would look like? I can’t. Would it be a battalion of sucking troops” ... and further references to blowjobs. It was a blatant case of devaluation, sexism and toxic masculinity. What’s more, people in the audience laughed, and a stand-up YouTube channel posted the video on their page (and still hasn’t deleted it). This video was sent to one of the feminists by a woman who had fought in Debaltsevo in 2015 and had seen hell on earth, including the torn bodies of her comrades. One can only imagine how she felt when she saw this video.

Also, one musician, who joined the military forces of Ukraine, on March 8 in his Instagram “congratulated” those guys who are hiding from the army, with the inference that they are supposedly women. These are just examples of recent high-profile cases, but on a domestic level there is still an unequal perception of women and men who are fighting.

*But those men who are in the Armed Forces with women note their courage, fearlessness and bravery.* Various volunteer initiatives make social films and projects to bring women in the army out of the shadows and show how they are on a par with men in combat, and the men themselves attest to this. *I think that this war will break down a lot of stereotypes. But still, it is a very high price to pay.*

In times of crisis — of defence of invaded nations and civil wars — women

fighters always appear, for example, the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, the Soviet women in the Great Patriotic War and more recently the women battalions in Rojava, so important in the defeat of Islamic State. What similarities and differences with these experiences do you see in the engagement of Ukrainian women in the resistance to the Russian invasion?

I think that Ukraine now has its own character. It is very different from the Soviet narrative of *War Has No Woman's Face* and it is not like the resistance of women in Rojava, because Kurdish women had to fight for basic rights and representation in society. In Spain there were constant conflicts about how women tried to fight for the right to fight as equals in the Republican army, but they were constantly thrown into secondary roles. It is difficult for me to say anything about the position of women in the army now, as that is best said by the women themselves after some time in the war has passed.

From what we can see, women's position in the army is surprisingly good, but surrounded by a lot of prejudice (as I described above). *The main problem is that the army is provided mostly for men's participation.* Both men and women resist in common, for the rights of all the people. But it must be understood that the role of women in it is very important, because their position would be much worse if Russia seized power. Because the power of the aggressor is very conservative and sharply denies women's rights.

We have read that there is a strong feminist tradition, if not in that name, in Ukraine, of self-sufficient women resistant to patriarchal attitudes and norms. What truth is there to this vision? How does it show in the present mobilisation of women against the Russian invasion?

Feminism in Ukraine is now a grassroots movement, run by activists. If you ask an average woman from the periphery what feminists are, she will answer something along the lines of "these are some crazy young girls who have not developed a personal life, so they dye their hair in bright colours and hate men." For example, my friend always tells me that feminists can only be young girls who don't have children and just want to find a community or a place to hang out. Obviously, there are a huge number of women with children in the feminist movement, but this attitude persists.

*I think that this non-mass popularity of feminism is due to economic and social prerequisites:* women have to work, look after children, provide for them somehow, and be a housewife (the stereotype that a woman is the keeper of the home is not going away). In the constant race for survival, you need to have the time and energy to be part of a movement/organisation/community. It is indeed said about women in

Ukraine (and they say it about themselves) that they are very strong, able to take a lot into their own hands, work hard and climb heights. But, as I mentioned before, they very often take that for granted.

Amid all the events and volunteering, the work of feminist organisations with women has increased dramatically. *It is also important that in addition to feminist organisations, there are organisations in which women play a leading role, and which are essentially fighting for women's rights in certain aspects (such as labour rights) — I want to mention the nurses' union Be like Nina.* I believe this will help us build trust and show that feminism is about fighting for our rights and our self-determination.

The strongest component of the Russian anti-war movement is Feminist Anti-War Resistance, whose Telegram channel carries regular reports of what is really happening in Ukraine, including correspondence from women in the areas temporarily occupied by Russian forces. How is the Ukrainian movement looking to collaborate with its Russian sisters?

I follow the activities of this movement and consider these girls to be the only adequate leftists in Russia. While the once popular leftists are either splitting up or continuing to tell old narratives about the USSR and the “fraternal peoples” and shoot videos on YouTube, these girls are engaged in underground activities and newspapers, putting up flyers, writing critical materials. I think that this is an important point for a totally *fragmented Russian society, where everyone is for himself or herself.* Many female members of Feminist Anti-War Resistance signed the manifesto of Ukrainian feminists that I wrote together with my comrades.

I cannot make any predictions about further interaction. It is important to understand that Ukrainian feminist initiatives are also going through difficult times. In the light of military events very many people do not even want to hear about having any kind of cooperation with anything Russian. And here everything will depend on how the situation develops.

What are the most important issues that feminists in the rest of the world need to understand about the struggle of their sisters against the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

We have seen many pacifist statements by Western feminists, including their manifesto.<sup>10</sup> In the face of war and the daily deaths of our women and children, we are critical of this position. In this context, I am part of a working group of Ukrainian feminists who have written the Ukrainian Feminist Manifesto. We call for support for Ukrainian women, including our right to armed resistance. *This war shows us that*

*feminism is a movement that needs to respond to changing situations, to be flexible and to develop principles according to new conditions.* What I mean here is that succumbing to geopolitical reasoning and geopolitical thinking and withdrawing from conflict by condemning all sides *is not a workable position*. We must clearly distinguish the rapist from the victim and help the victim to assert her right to exist and to be a subject.

### Is there anything else you would like to add?

Our main goal now is to win this war. We understand that it can be protracted, and it is not a quick process, and there are hopes for it. *What is critical to victory is not to let the war and all the terrible events in Ukraine disappear from the world's agenda.* If everyone conditionally gets used to it, it will be harder for us to survive and the problem will not only be ours — there is a risk to the world, too. I ask you to support one of the Social Movement's biggest campaigns for writing off Ukraine's foreign debt, which you can find out more about at [cancel-ukrainian-debt.org](http://cancel-ukrainian-debt.org). It is a great burden for the Ukrainian economy, which has been created by years of oligarchical dominance. We have created a website where we have gathered arguments, a petition and materials from around the world in support. It's important for women, too, because we will be the ones rebuilding Ukraine.

*I want to say that women are already doing a lot to make Ukraine recover.* And we, as a leftist organisation, are fighting for our labour and social rights, which the government is trying to curtail to various degrees. This is important for the post-war rebuilding of Ukraine to be possible and based on the principles of non-discrimination. ■

# Mykhailo Amosov

## **‘To stop the war, start moving away from fossil fuels’<sup>11</sup>**

*Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has reaped untold devastation on the nation’s critical agricultural sector, leading to severe disruptions to the global food market and exacerbating world hunger. Federico Fuentes spoke to Mykhailo Amosov, an agricultural expert at the Centre for Environmental Initiatives “Ecoaction”, about this situation, the links between Russia’s war and the fight against climate change, and prospects for a “Green Reconstruction”.*

**What can you tell us about the agreement signed in July 2022 between Ukraine and Russia, whereby Russia agreed to lift its blockade on ships carrying food exports leaving Ukraine’s Black Sea ports?**

Ukraine is a large agricultural country. It has a huge capacity when it comes to grain exports, which is an important source of income for Ukraine’s budget. Agriculture represents about 12% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product, but most of this comes from exports, so Ukraine is dependent on its seaports to receive this income.

Before the war, Ukraine had plans to export about 6 million tons a month via its seaports. But once Russia blockaded these seaports, it became impossible to export. In the first months of the war, exports dropped to around 500,000 tons a month. This meant grains had to be stored in silos, as there was no way to get them onto the world market.

The [July 2022] agreement has given us the opportunity to once again export Ukrainian grain. But unfortunately, it is not on the same scale as it was before the war. We are only dealing with small doses of grain export: it is more than it was before the agreement, but it is not enough to allow us to free up grain currently stored in silos, much less deal with future harvests. A new harvest is coming for wheat and barley, as is the next stage of harvest for corn and sunflower. Unfortunately, we will need huge

silos to store these harvests as the current levels of exports is nowhere near what is needed to get this produce to the world market.

The agreement will at least help Ukraine earn some money from sales on the global market that our government can use to help support Ukrainian citizens who have lost everything. We hope it will also help keep agricultural enterprises afloat. Thousands of agricultural enterprises are considering closing because it is impossible to continue operating if your only source of income is cut off.

Of course, this agreement is helpful, but we should be moving faster. I should also mention that we were afraid Russia would not abide by the agreement. In fact, the very next day after it was signed, Russia launched a missile strike on the port of Odesa, which is crazy, but it is to be expected for Russia to act like this. At the same time, we are attempting to find new ways to export via other routes. Our railway system is different to those in European countries, which makes it difficult to export grain this way. But I saw that Ukraine has restored an old railway line between Berezyne, in western Ukraine, and Basarabasca, in Moldova, which had not been used since the times of the Soviet Union. Ukraine is working to restore a lot of railway lines that had been forgotten for decades. This should help us to increase grain export levels.

### Beyond the blockade of Ukraine's seaports, how else has Russia's occupation affected Ukraine's agricultural sector?

I cannot find the words to truly describe its impact, but it has been terrible. Many agricultural farms have been completely destroyed and livestock animals killed due to indiscriminate shelling by Russian troops: they do not just target military bases or trenches but everything they see with their helicopters; they are shelling everything. This has caused tremendous damage to Ukraine's agriculture. In monetary terms, it is estimated that the war has caused at least \$30 billion worth of damages [at the time of the interview in late August]: this includes damage caused by the blockade of seaports of about \$25 million, as well as direct damage to crops, infrastructure and farms destroyed by Russian shelling, which is estimated to be about \$5 billion. And the war has not ended.

Already, about 10 million hectares of land has been lost for agricultural activities due to landmines, shelling, bombardments, etc. We will need a lot of funds to de-mine these territories and restore them for cultivation, but also for conservation. The war has not just hit the agricultural sector but damaged wetlands, forests and marine ecosystems. As an environmental organisation, we see an important need to promote conservation once the war ends. Currently, 70% of Ukrainian territory is agricultural land, but we need to reduce this number to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from



agricultural production and increase the amount set aside to protect biodiversity.

It is important to add that some see Russia's attacks on Ukraine's agricultural sector as deliberate, because of its importance to Ukraine in economic terms but also because of the role agriculture plays in social life. Unlike big agricultural corporations, who have their offices in Kyiv and are not interested in local communities, small farmers live, work and communicate with local people on a day-to-day basis, helping others when they need it. These farmers are very patriotic people. Many of them have now joined the resistance in the south. There is a strong history of Ukrainian farmers being part of underground resistance movements because they know the local area and the people very well. Because of this, they have a certain level of influence over the local population, in some cases a level of influence greater than that of local government officials. In some places, when Russian occupiers enter these territories, it is more important to talk with certain local farmers than local government officials because of the importance they have among the community.

**There have been a lot of memes and stories circulating on social media claiming Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has used the war to sell off the country's agricultural land to Western multinationals. What can you tell us about agricultural land ownership in Ukraine and Zelensky's policies?**

Such stories are just Russian propaganda. The reality is that last year Ukraine launched its land market. Prior to 2021, there was a moratorium on the sale of land plots. As of July [2021], Ukrainians have had the right to buy or sell land. According to this law, only private individuals can buy or sell land plots. Legal entities established under Ukrainian legislation will only be allowed to participate in the land market from 2024. So, it is a two stage process: from 2021, individuals can participate in the land market; while from 2024, Ukrainian legal entities can participate.

There are still limitations on land sales: an individual can only buy up 100 hectares. Of course, if you belong to a large and wealthy family, you can concentrate some farmland, but it's still not a big amount. Once legal entities are able to enter the market in 2024, the limit will rise to 10,000 hectares, but again, this is only for Ukrainian legal entities and not for international companies.

What international companies are allowed to do is lease land from the government or individuals for agricultural activities. Contrary to the fake news circulating, this was already the case before Zelensky. International companies can sign agreements to lease land for up to 49 years at a very cheap price. For these companies, it doesn't make sense to buy land if you can lease it for half a century. Even if they want to build agricultural facilities on the land, this is not an issue under the law. That is why

international companies have already established many enterprises in Ukraine, in particular German companies that are interested in producing rapeseed, as there is great interest in the European market to use it for biofuels.

### What can you tell us about what environmentalists in Ukraine are saying with regards to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which has been taken over by Russian forces, and other nuclear power plants?

As an environmental organisation, Ecoaction was pushing to decommission Ukraine's nuclear power plant reactors even before the war. Ukraine has about 15 reactors and most of them are obsolete. We had been pushing the government to decommission these reactors as they already posed a danger for Ukrainians. Now, due to Russia's invasion, they have become an immediate danger not just for Ukraine, but for Europe and even Russia.

Russia's use of the largest European nuclear power plant as a military base from which to attack the Ukrainian army is a serious and irresponsible breach of nuclear safety rules and another example of Russia's disregard for international nuclear law and norms. Russia is blackmailing the world with the threat of a large-scale nuclear disaster at Zaporizhzhia. There is a huge risk that an accident larger than Chernobyl could occur at Zaporizhzhia.

It is therefore necessary to completely demilitarise the Zaporizhzhia plant and return it to Ukrainian control. At the same time, we need to develop action plans to minimise potential nuclear safety risks and consider the possibility of shifting all power units at the Zaporizhzhia plant to a "cold" shutdown state.

### Ecoaction has participated in discussions regarding Ukraine's post-war reconstruction and proposed the idea of a "Green Reconstruction". What can you tell us about these discussions?

Ecoaction participated in the conference on Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, which was jointly hosted by Ukraine and Switzerland, in Lugarno on July 4-5 [2022]. Our executive director travelled to Switzerland to participate. What was interesting about the discussion was that the environment section of the discussion was housed under energy. This explains a lot about their vision, which sees environmental recovery as a way to promote the expansion of the nuclear sector and fossil fuel projects, such as gas for domestic consumption. Meanwhile concrete environmental actions are limited to small projects such as ecoducts, or wildlife bridges. Ecoducts might make for an interesting media conference and be easy to sell as taking action on the environment, but it is not what we want or need. Instead, we need more systemic change.

It is evident that hundreds of billions of dollars will be needed for Ukraine's reconstruction over the next 10 years. This could rise depending on how long the war continues for, but we hope it will end soon — with a Ukrainian victory, of course! Current reconstruction plans are ambitious, but they will need a lot of money and the Ukrainian government is hoping to involve different international financial institutions and the European Union and the United States.

But if they want to get funds, for example, from the European Union, they will have to improve environmental standards. Yet there is no real space for discussing environmental standards, in large part because all environmental discussion is concentrated in the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. So you have situations, like we had before the war, where, under the Association Agreement with the European Union, we needed to decrease nitrate pollution, but the Ministry of Agriculture said their ministry had nothing to do with the environment and there was no communication between the two ministries. While ultimately the nitrate directive was implemented, this problem of lack of communication continues to exist.

What we have seen to date is disappointing, but we are focused on improving this reconstruction plan and hope we can achieve changes. We hope, at some stage, the government will organise roundtables with representatives of civil society to discuss these issues, where we can provide our vision and principles for sustainable reconstruction. For now, we face the difficulties of war and martial law, which makes it impossible to access and disseminate information freely. This makes it harder for us to campaign. But we are trying our best, including using our strength, which is social media.

The reality is that even before the war, the environmental movement in Ukraine was quite weak, it comprised perhaps 6 or 7 organisations and tens of activists. So, support from other environmentalists around the world is important. We will have a lot of work to do when it comes to reconstruction, to rebuilding a better Ukraine — or better said, an even better Ukraine than the one we had before February 24. We will need the expertise of those in the international community with experience in post-war recovery and reconstruction. Of course, for now, the best help you can give is to support Ukraine win this war.

### Ecoaction argues that climate change and the war against Ukraine have a direct link. What is this link?

The answer is fossil fuels and the dependence that exists on them. Russia has a lot of fossil fuels it can sell to fuel its war in Ukraine. It is very easy for Russia to obtain large sums of funds to finance its war machine. At the same time, there have been a lot of

discussions at the United Nations level regarding climate change and the need to move away from fossil fuels. Moving away from fossil fuels is a means to stop funding war while building more sustainable economies based on renewable energies. Accelerating the abandonment of fossil fuels could stop the war in Ukraine and prevent future resource-based conflicts. Instead, what we are seeing is that countries are preferring to look elsewhere for their fossil fuels.

Something else that we are seeing is that despite the sanctions and stated support from European countries for Ukraine, EU imports from Russia have grown in monetary terms. What does this tell us about these countries' support for Ukraine and their interest — or lack thereof — in moving away from a fossil fuel economy?

It certainly looks like European governments are taking an ambiguous policy towards Ukraine. They are trying to maintain their high living standards and avoid any disruptions at home. I can understand that, but if they really want to help us, they should move quickly to close the gas pipelines from Russia. We are, of course, very thankful for their financial support. Ukraine needs at least \$5 billion a month to fill the budgetary gap caused by this war. We face a big challenge, and we understand that Europe does as well. But we need to move faster.

Revenue from fossil fuel exports provides 40% of Russia's budget, and Russia has already said that increased earnings from fossil fuel exports will be used to fund its war in Ukraine. How can countries say they support Ukraine, but at the same time pump even more money into enabling Russia's continued aggression? Unfortunately, for now, it seems European countries are moving very slowly. Globally, we need to speed up the deployment of clean energy to replace fossil fuel imports and ease the high fuel prices which are driving up Russia's revenues. Our main request to European countries and the European Union is to move faster. I can understand how difficult it is to break links with Russia, but this needs to be done to stop this war and save Ukrainian lives. ■

# **Voices from Russia**



# Ilya Matveev

## **‘Putin’s war on Ukraine is not about security, it is about imperialist interests’<sup>12</sup>**

*Ilya Matveev is a Russian socialist, political economist and member of the editorial collective of Posle (After), a new Russian antiwar website. Matveev discusses the background to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and why the international left needs to come to grips with Russian imperialism, with Federico Fuentes.*

Very few predicted Russia would invade Ukraine on the scale that it did on February 24, yet many were quick to come up with explanations for Putin’s actions. How do you account for the invasion and current war?

First, when I heard that Russia had invaded Ukraine on February 24, I was completely shocked and demoralised, but I was not completely surprised because the possibility that this invasion could occur was always there. It was there simply due to the masses of Russian troops that had been stationed along the Ukrainian border, almost 200,000 soldiers for more than a year. I would say that an invasion was on the cards ever since March-April of 2021. Some people said that amassing troops on the Ukrainian border was a kind of bluff by Putin, but bluffing is not Putin’s style because, according to his principles, if you demonstrate force then you must be ready to use that force. So, from the moment Putin amassed 200,000 soldiers on the Ukrainian border it was clear that he was ready to invade.

Second, we need to understand this conflict from a longer term perspective. There was already a war going on between Russia and Ukraine prior to the invasion. If you open up the Wikipedia page on the Russo-Ukrainian War, it refers to 2014 as the starting point for the war, when Russia annexed Crimea. I think that makes sense. The war itself can be traced back through the prolonged conflict that began eight years ago, when Russia started supporting separatists in eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea. In this sense, the Russian invasion is just the latest phase of the war. Yes, the previous

phase was one of a war on a smaller scale, but we are still talking about no less than 10,000 Russian troops that participated in that first phase of the Russian war on Ukraine. The latest phase of the war falls within the logic of this conflict that began in 2014.

A threshold was crossed with the annexation of Crimea. It is important to understand this and to separate out the history of Russia and Ukraine before and after this annexation. Prior to this, Ukraine had signed the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, whereby it handed over its nuclear weapons to Russia in return for security assurances that Russia would not attack Ukraine. Putin trampled on those assurances by essentially going to war with Ukraine and occupying parts of it in 2014-15. So, this is when the war started. Ever since then, with the troop buildup, a large-scale invasion became possible. It became possible, but I would say not inevitable: it was still Putin's choice to launch this invasion.

It is often said that Russia's annexation of Crimea was primarily due to security concerns, in particular its fear of losing access to its naval base on the Black Sea. In a similar vein, some say Putin's invasion in February was also driven by security concerns regarding NATO expansionism. Is it the case that Russia's actions in Ukraine since 2014 have been primarily driven by such security concerns?

It is not entirely clear why Russia annexed Crimea or why it invaded in February. We do not know with 100% certainty why Putin did this. But we can make an educated guess.

Russian leaders clearly saw that Ukraine was moving decisively away from Russia's sphere of influence and aligning itself with the West. For the Kremlin, a Ukraine that is independent of Russia, one where key decisions are not made in Russia and that aligns itself with the West, is unacceptable. Ever since the Maidan uprising in 2014, Ukraine has been drifting away from Russia's orbit and closer to the West. During that time, the Kremlin has demonstrated that it is prepared to do whatever it takes to subjugate Ukraine and force it back into its sphere of influence.

The annexation of Crimea was probably specifically dictated by Russia's fear of losing its Black Sea Fleet and its naval base in Sebastopol. For some leftists, this serves as a justification for Russia's annexation. But can we really justify this kind of preventive aggression? Now, Russia is in the process of annexing even more territories from another sovereign country. This kind of preventive aggression is not normal behaviour; this kind of preventive imperialist intervention is not acceptable, and it is not justifiable.

The problem with official Russian discourse is that it tries to conflate Russian security with Russian imperialist interests. They always talk about security. They talk



about Ukraine somehow being an existential threat to Russia. But Russia started the war with Ukraine, and if this war is not an existential threat — with the whole of the West against Russia — then how can Ukraine moving away from Russia's sphere of influence represent an existential threat? Clearly such a situation would be much more benign than the war we have now. The Kremlin chose to go to war. Even now, the Kremlin feels secure enough to continue waging war, even as Western countries supply Ukraine with weapons.

In my opinion this is ultimately not about security; it is about imperialist interests and the imperial ideology that characterises the Russian regime. It has an imperial vision towards the post-Soviet space, and specifically towards Ukraine. It cannot tolerate Ukraine being a sovereign country. That's the bottom line.

You talk about Ukraine moving towards the West, but if we look at Russia's trajectory since the turn of the century, we see that Russia too was attempting to integrate itself into the West. Yet, in seeming contradiction to this, we've seen on the political terrain, and not just in Ukraine but in Syria and other countries, that Russia is not afraid to directly confront the West, perhaps like no other country has. How do you explain this contradiction within 21st century Russia?

I completely agree that it's a paradox and it is difficult to explain using the existing theories of imperialism. There is no ready-made explanation for this kind of situation. But if we go back to Vladimir Lenin, to Leon Trotsky, one concept we can use to better understand Russia is that of uneven and combined development. As a part of the global capitalist system, we can see features of uneven and combined development in Russia. Going back more than 100 years, the former Russian tsarist empire was economically weak but had a disproportionately large military and a disproportionately large influence on global politics. Russia has been characterised by this strange combination of economic weakness and military strength for some time.

At present, I would say that Russia is not a "normal" country because, on the one hand, it has its oligarchs, it has its ruling class like any other capitalist country, that is integrated into global capitalism. This ruling class would prefer much more friendlier relations with the West. But, at the same time, Russia has a military that it inherited from the Soviet Union. It has a disproportionately large military; in sheer numbers it is the second largest army in the world, even if its performance in Ukraine has demonstrated that many people overestimated Russia's military strength. But in numerical terms, it is a huge military force. And on top of this, there is a Soviet strategic culture that the Russian regime inherited.

So, we have this strange imbalance of, on the one hand, a ruling class that is orientated towards closer ties with the West and, on the other hand, a military, foreign policy and national security elite — along with the military itself — that has interests that diverge from those of the ruling class, or where some kind of disconnect exists between the two. This is the reality we have. We cannot deny the existence of Russian imperialism just because this does not fit into our theory of imperialism. What we need to do is to develop a genuine analysis of what Russia is and what Russia does, instead of trying to fit Russia's actions into some kind of preconceived notion of imperialism. Perhaps we should even update our theory of imperialism to better explain Russian aggression in Ukraine.

### Why do you insist that it's so important for the left outside of Russia to understand Russian imperialism?

Let's start with a counterfactual. Let's imagine that we deny the fact that Russia is imperialist, and only view the countries of the capitalist core as imperialist countries. What flows from this denial of Russian imperialism? How do we explain Russian aggression while denying Russia's imperialist status? Inevitably we end up coming to the conclusion that Russia's actions in Ukraine are not aggression but rather some kind of defence against Western imperialism, against United States imperialism. But this is patently false, because Russia is not defending itself; right now it is very clearly attacking.

There are leftists who think exactly this: that if Russia is not imperialist, then it is a non-imperialist power defending itself from Western imperialism, and therefore its actions are justified as they constitute a justifiable defence against imperialism. But this is simply not true. What Russia is attempting to do is consolidate its influence within the post-Soviet space in the region, and in Ukraine specifically, because Russia cannot tolerate an independent Ukraine, one that is independent of Russian political influence.

It is very important to recognise Russian imperialism, alongside Western imperialism, because doing so enables us to clearly see who is the culprit and who is the victim. Ukraine is clearly the victim in all this. The ideas articulated by Russian leaders are very openly imperialist. They say Ukraine is not a real country, Ukrainians are not a real nation, Ukraine should be part of Russia. They are essentially saying that Ukrainians are basically Russians and that therefore Russia should enforce its control over the Ukrainian state or even make Ukraine part of Russia. They are arguing in favour of erasing Ukrainian national identity and forcing Ukrainians to be Russians. Isn't this a clear expression of imperialism, much like the colonial empires, and what

Russia did in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the nineteenth century? We need an analysis of Russian imperialism to differentiate between imperialist ambitions and struggles for national liberation.

But even if we accept that Russia is imperialist, it is clearly not the main imperialist power in the world today: the United States continues to hold that position. Given this, some would argue that any weakening of Russia as a result of a defeat in Ukraine would ultimately strengthen US imperialism, and that therefore the best solution is a ceasefire and some kind of negotiated settlement.

This is a tactical question, but of course it is a crucial one. Let's start again with a counterfactual: let's say we call for a ceasefire. How would we guarantee this ceasefire, even if, somehow, Russia agreed to it? A ceasefire in the current situation would only mean giving Russia time to regroup and mobilise more forces in order to then restart the war and conquer more of Ukraine. The Russian government has never indicated that it is ready to stop this war. In fact, there are indications that it still holds on to its maximalist goal of conquering all of Ukraine, including Kyiv. I don't see any evidence that they have abandoned those goals. In that sense, a ceasefire would just play into Russian hands and prolong the war.

Ultimately, yes, NATO will be strengthened as a result of this war; in fact, this is already happening on a huge scale. The problem is that the trigger for this was not anything NATO did; the trigger was Putin's decision to invade. Arguing that we need a Ukrainian surrender in order to weaken NATO is very poor logic.

Allowing Russia to conquer more territories would mean erasing everything that is Ukrainian in those territories. If we allow Russia to continue annexing more and more of Ukraine, then everything that is Ukrainian in those territories will simply be erased. I don't think that Russia will even tolerate the Ukrainian language being spoken in those territories. There are indications, for example, that Ukrainian teachers in the occupied territories are being forced to study Russian in order to teach in Russian and be integrated into the Russian education system.

I think that it is very faulty logic for the left internationally to think it can fight NATO via Russia. That is the logic behind arguing that Russia is fighting NATO, so therefore Russia should somehow win in order to weaken NATO. It is not Russia's job to weaken NATO. It is the job of the Western left to weaken NATO and replace it with a new system of international relations.

I agree that NATO is an imperialist alliance and that, despite what they say, NATO is not a defensive alliance. We have seen NATO go on the offensive several times in

various countries. NATO is a belligerent entity, but we should not fight NATO by wishing for a Russian victory over NATO countries. This is not some kind of zero-sum game in which Western leftists should cheer for the other team, for the other camp. That is campist logic [which sees the basic division in politics as one between the US-led “camp” and the “camp” of its opponents], which I reject 100%.

What leftists need to do is think through what a new global security architecture could look like, think through what new system of international relations could replace NATO, and fight for governmental power in order to bring about this new security architecture. That is the job of the international left.

And the job of the Russian left is to halt the imperialist aggression that Russia is waging. There is no other option. It is impossible for Russian leftists to, in any way, tolerate or justify this kind of aggression. Tens of thousands of civilians and Ukrainian and Russian soldiers have already died in Ukraine. This is a catastrophe. This invasion makes no sense, it has made the situation worse for everyone — Ukrainians, the people in the Donbas, and the Russian population too. It is a catastrophe from any perspective that you look at it. The best thing that could happen is an immediate end to this war through the withdrawal of Russian troops and a return, at least, to the status quo that existed prior to February 24, 2022. ■

# Boris Kagarlitsky

## ‘People will not fight for the Putin regime’<sup>13</sup>

*Boris Kagarlitsky is a Moscow-based sociologist and editor of the socialist website Rabkor (Worker Correspondent). In this interview with Federico Fuentes, Kagarlitsky provides insight into the domestic factors behind Russia’s decision to invade Ukraine, why Putin seeks an “everlasting war”, the role of the left in anti-war organising and prospects for social upheaval in Russia.*

Discussions in the West regarding Putin’s invasion of Ukraine have largely focused on NATO expansionism, the Kremlin’s imperialist ambitions or Putin’s mental health. But you argue none of these were the key driving force behind the invasion. Why?

When a huge event occurs, such as the war on Ukraine, there are generally various factors at play. But you have to put these factors into the context of real political and social processes. In that sense, all these factors, along with the long-term conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the conflict within Ukraine and between Ukrainian elites, are present. However, these factors do not explain much; they’re very superficial.

Let’s start with NATO. NATO’s expansion is definitely real. NATO not only expanded into former Eastern bloc countries, such as Poland and Hungary; it also expanded into former territories of the Soviet Union, such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In that sense, NATO cannot technically expand any closer to Russia, as its frontier is already less than 200 kilometres from St Petersburg. We should also not forget that in the early years of Putin’s rule, Russia had very good relations with NATO. Putin himself confessed he wanted Russia to join NATO. It was the West that refused Russia’s membership when relations started to deteriorate — precisely because of the conflict in and around Ukraine.

Yet it was always clear that NATO was not going to accept Ukraine as a full member because this was going to pose a big problem for NATO. In many ways,

Ukrainian ambitions to join NATO created more problems for NATO than for Russia, because it meant Ukraine wanting NATO to spend lots of money on Ukraine's military. The irony is that Putin's attack on Ukraine not only led to Sweden and Finland joining [NATO], but it has now made Ukrainian membership possible. Up until February 24, the chances of Ukraine becoming a full member were remote. Now, the situation has changed, and the perspective of Ukraine becoming a *de facto* NATO country is not only very real, but is already becoming a reality. So if we want to view this war as a conflict between Russia and NATO, then it is obvious that Putin's policies have been counterproductive and achieved the exact opposite of what is presented as an excuse for the war.

In terms of Russia, or rather Putin's imperialist ambitions, this was also present: You just have to watch or listen to Russian propaganda to see how it goes beyond all limits in terms of jingoism and racism. Russian propaganda continuously states that Ukraine shouldn't exist, that Ukrainian territory is actually Russian territory that has been conquered by Ukrainians. It says Russia is going to liberate these territories from the population that lives there; that they are not the right population for that territory. All sorts of racist, fascist statements are made on state channels. It's an absolutely incredible flood of aggression, xenophobia and hatred.

We could also say that the internal conflict in Ukraine is to some extent a cause of the war. But this conflict has been present for eight years, with very little change. Frozen conflicts can persist, sometimes for hundreds of years, without leading to war. When they do lead to war, the real causes of the wars are to be found not in the origins of the conflict but in the context of concrete situations. Take for example, the Malvinas/Falkland Islands conflict between Britain and Argentina, which persisted for centuries. The explanation for why a war erupted in 1981 cannot be found in the origins of the conflict, but rather in the internal crisis within the Argentine military junta and, to some extent, [former British prime minister] Margaret Thatcher's need for some kind of success story to help turn around the polls. So, this was exactly the right time for war to erupt: both sides needed the war for their own domestic reasons.

The real question is why this war erupted now, despite problems within Ukraine and between Russia and Ukraine existing for years. Even just a week before the war, most rational Russian political commentators were extremely sceptical that a war would break out, because everyone knew Russia was absolutely not ready for war. This brings us to the issue not of Putin's mental health, but his capacity to make rational decisions. Everyone knew the war would not turn out the way it was planned or announced by Putin's team. Nevertheless, they went to war. This demonstrates that these people were not able to even calculate the most basic things. I am no

military analyst, but even I could predict that Russia had no chance of taking Kyiv and achieving a full-scale victory. You had to be totally incompetent or totally disconnected from reality to think otherwise. Yet government propaganda said the exact opposite. Well, it is pretty clear now who was right. In that sense, Putin's mental health and the way decisions are made in the Kremlin played a role.

### What would you say were the real causes of the war?

I think there were two major causes.

The first one is basically global and long-term. It was the Great Recession of 2007-8, which changed the global economy and Russia's situation within it. The recession revealed the tremendous weakness of the Russian economy. Yet, at the same time, Russian oligarchs benefited from it. When the recession erupted, Russia's economy declined at a much faster rate than any other major economy in the world. Then it recovered faster than any economy in the world. Why? Because Russia's economy was dependent on raw materials, and in particular oil. To deal with the Great Recession, the US Federal Reserve began printing money, much of which ended up in financial markets and, ultimately, as speculative investments. Oil is a perfect commodity for speculative investment, as it is deeply connected to financial markets. Yet, at the same time, it is part of the real economy. The Federal Reserve's policy led to an enormous increase in oil prices, which in turn created a situation where, while the Russian economy continued to deteriorate, Russia was showered in petrodollars, with more and more income going into the pockets of the oligarchs and the state. A Russian economist once commented that the Russian government's best friend was the Federal Reserve. The Russian government depended directly on money printed by the Federal Reserve: the more money the Federal Reserve printed, the more money Russian elites got. They didn't have to do anything except wait for the Federal Reserve to print more dollars. That was their whole strategy. But once the Federal Reserve started to print less money, or at least started to use this money in a different way, as happened during COVID-19, then this became a problem for Russian capital.

All this led to an enormous expansion of corruption. Russia was always very corrupt, but corruption now hit new heights. Russian elites were faced with an incredible crisis of overaccumulation, much like what Rosa Luxemburg described in her book, *The Accumulation of Capital*. One solution was to channel this extra money towards military expansion and producing a lot of military hardware. But then you have to use this military hardware somehow if you want to continue investing more money into this sector.

But that's just one side of the story because, at the same time, the domestic

situation was drastically deteriorating. While all this money was going in the hands of the elite and a small sector of the middle class, health care, social services, welfare — sectors that were already tremendously underfunded — underwent further cuts to expenditure in order for the elites to accumulate even more capital. One example of this was the pension reform of 2018, which faced stiff opposition.

Imagine how an average Russian citizen felt. They knew that there was an enormous amount of money flowing into the hands of the oligarchy, the state bureaucracy, top administrators, and Putin's friends. They could see the construction of incredible palaces – forget about Versailles in France; just near where I have my *dacha* [holiday home], you can see some huge walls as you drive from there to Moscow. What's behind these walls? Palaces. We know that because the internet allows you to discover everything. These palaces are much bigger than what you will find in Versailles. And this is in an area regarded by the wealthy to be second-class; it is not even where the wealthiest Russian oligarchs live.

People see that and see that the material situation of the great majority is getting dramatically worse, that real income is declining and prices are rising, that they are having problems getting decent jobs. All this generates tremendous discontent. This discontent is very often not political, but it creates a terrible mood. So much so that it has even become a problem for the Russian government's war plans, because it cannot mobilise people for the army. People will just not fight for this regime. Nobody wants to make any sacrifices for them, because they are hated by everybody.

On top of this, you have the fact that political institutions — even the fake parliamentary democracy that we had with elections contested by parties that were very much under the regime's control — have been destroyed [since 2020] due to attempts by Putin's teams to consolidate power. Putin is getting older and more ill, so the problem of a transition of power is very real, but any kind of institutional transition is not possible in this context.

So how do you deal with all this? Well, the best solution is to come up with some kind of extreme and extraordinary situation. A situation that justifies a state of emergency, whereby the people who make decisions can override any institutional or constitutional hurdle and make whatever decisions they want to make. And a war is perhaps the best way to create such a situation.

Given what you say about the Kremlin's obvious lack of strategy going into war, is there any sense as to what Putin's aims are in Ukraine, and whether they are interested in negotiations with Ukraine to obtain them?

The invasion was very much improvised and did not have any long-term strategy



behind it. Once the regime's improvised strategy failed, they clearly started inventing new causes and goals for the war *post-facto*. We are dealing with a very rare case in which a country wages an aggressive war but struggles to define what its goals are or explain them to the public. This is partly because the elite is confused, they don't know what to do and they're desperately looking for a way out. But at this point they cannot find one.

The main problem now is not that they do not want to negotiate; the main problem is that, no matter what they achieve through negotiations, they won't be able to sell it to the public given the tremendous discontent that exists. This is why it is so hard for the Russian elite and Russian government to reach a settlement. It is not just a case of having to make a deal with Ukraine and the West, which they could do. They have to be able to sell any deal they make to the domestic public, which is something that they cannot do. No matter how this ends, it's going to generate a massive moral, political, ideological crisis and, even perhaps, upheaval in the country...

From what you are saying, continuation of the war is therefore preferable for Putin than negotiations? I ask this because within the Western left, it is common to hear the argument that it is NATO and Ukraine who want to drag out the war and reject negotiations. But your comments seem to suggest the opposite.

Absolutely. That is why, in recent statements, Putin has revealed his eagerness to prolong the crisis as much as possible. As I have written about, they have been very clear about waging an "everlasting war" that continues forever, in which agreements are never reached, because they do not know what to agree on. And, as I said before, it's not because they cannot compromise or even because they do not want to compromise; it's because they cannot sell this to the public domestically. Especially as the invasion did generate a strong sense of jingoism and genuine enthusiasm for the war among a section of society. They managed to consolidate the most reactionary, most aggressive, the most evil elements of Russian society behind the war. The problem now is that these elements have become dangerous even for the regime itself, because at the very moment the regime negotiates and achieves any kind of settlement, it will immediately become the target of these reactionary forces.

This was already visible in April 2022, when a meeting between Russian and Ukrainian delegations in Istanbul agreed to some kind of settlement that included a Ukrainian declaration that it would not join NATO. This was something Russia could have used to justify its invasion and point to as a victory. But while the Ukrainians were ready to sign it, Russia did not sign. To understand why, we need to look at what happened inside Russia. The very same day that they announced this preliminary

agreement, there was a real eruption of anger and hatred in the pro-government media, a real rebellion by the pro-war party, that included threats to kill negotiators. In response, Russia pulled back from the agreement. Faced with the forces from hell they had unleashed, Putin's people became scared.

Then consider that, on the other side, you have anti-war sentiment that is very strong, even if it's severely repressed. The Putin administration is very much stuck between a rock and a hard place, because you have very strong anti-war sentiment and you have a pro-war, jingoistic, militaristic, nationalistic movement that will become oppositional the very moment that the regime reaches a settlement.

The worst-case scenario for Putin — and it is certainly not excluded that at some point this might happen, particularly if Russia is defeated militarily — is that these forces, which are very different and oppose each other on every single issue, could suddenly attack the regime simultaneously from opposite sides. This is what happened in Russia in 1917, when the tsarist regime collapsed not just because of the anti-war forces, but also because of the anger of those within the military and the regime who were not happy with the way the war was being fought. These two forces attacked the tsarist regime simultaneously, leading to its collapse. Putin's people are aware of this history, but there is very little they can do about it.

I want to return to the anti-war movement in Russia, but I would like to follow up on a point you raised regarding the far-right nationalists forces that have been unleashed in Russia. This has to do with the discussion surrounding fascism in Russia and Ukraine. How do you characterise the governments in Moscow and Kyiv and the role played by fascist or far-right nationalists inside or outside these governments? Has the war helped to stoke these far-right tendencies or has it opened up space for other voices?

Both sides accuse the other side of being fascist, but I think that neither side is fascist. That said, the ideology of the far right, and the tendencies that are typical of right-wing populism, and even fascism, are present in both countries.

In terms of their political and social content, the two sides are not very different. Of course, there are differences. For example, Ukraine has a much weaker state. This creates spaces in which the far right can carry out non-state-controlled repressive activities, in some cases with the support of elements of the Ukrainian security services. The Russian state does not allow such things to happen. There are no private repressive apparatuses or paramilitaries because the Russian state has an absolute monopoly over repression. In Russia, repression is centralised, while in Ukraine it is decentralised. At the same time, unlike Russia, Ukraine has a civil society that is not repressed,

precisely because the state is weaker. The state has not repressed civil society in Ukraine because it does not have the capacity to repress it like in Russia.

Another difference is that the Ukrainian oligarchy is not consolidated, while the Russian oligarchy is consolidated around Putin — or at least was until recently. The Ukrainian oligarchy was never consolidated because it didn't have much in the way of oil or other resources that could be sold on the global market to generate easy income. Instead, Ukrainian oligarchs systematically fought against each other. This created an image of Ukraine as a pluralistic democracy, which it is not. Rather, it is a weak state with competing oligarchies.

So, there are differences, but it does not change the fact that the ideological content of Russian and Ukrainian nationalism is very similar and the social nature of the state and capitalism in both countries is very similar. Both are dominated by oligarchic, peripheral capitalism.

However, it is important to note that there are some very positive signs on the Ukrainian side. Let's be clear, there is no way that you can have an anti-war movement in Ukraine. That is understandable because Ukraine is the country that is being attacked. It is a victim of Russian aggression. When your city is being bombed and shelled daily, you cannot protest against your own armed forces, who are fighting back to keep you safe.

But there is a growing tendency against Ukrainian nationalism within Ukrainian society and a growing debate about what to do, if and when Ukraine wins. It is also important to note that on the frontline, the Ukrainian army is mostly composed of Russian speakers. On top of this, you have the Territorial Defence, a volunteer force which has about 200,000 armed troops fighting in eastern Ukrainian, who are also predominantly Russian speakers. It seems quite possible that Ukraine is going to undergo some very serious shifts in the directions of a more integrated society once the war ends. It is also not excluded that it may face some sort of civil conflict — even potentially a civil war — but it's too early to judge.

### Let's now turn to the anti-war movement in Russia. What is your sense of the state of anti-war organising?

When the war started, there were initially quite a lot of protests in Russia, but they were brutally repressed. The reality is that there was no way in which you could protest on the streets, because you would immediately be beaten up and put in jail. The government's repression machine managed to early on win the struggle for control of the streets, though they needed a lot of repression to achieve this. It is important not to forget that there had been massive protests, involving hundreds of thousands

of people, during the past two years, along with a long-term sustained effort by the repressive apparatus to destroy these movements. They achieved this, at least temporarily.

People can now be sent to jail just for making a public anti-war statement. Simply using particular words can mean you face jail time. They sentenced a municipal deputy in Moscow to seven years jail just for saying something critical of the war during a session of the municipal council. When I publish something in Russian, I never use the word war, because just using the word war means I could receive a fine or jail. So, you can imagine what the atmosphere is like. Nevertheless, if you look on Russian social media networks, where you can post anonymously, the atmosphere is very negative towards the war. People are very critical and publish a lot of very angry texts against the war. The anti-war movement is very weak, but it has tremendous potential.

**What role has the left played in anti-war organising? What can you tell us about the positions taken towards the war by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation?**

The official parties within the Duma support the war and the regime, including the two parties that pretend to be “left-wing”: the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) and the so-called social democrats of A Just Russia. But if you look deeper, you can see that where they have any rank-and-file activists on the ground, these people are usually very anti-war. Quite a lot of them are now leaving these parties. Some have declared their opposition publicly, such as Yevgeny Stupin, a very charismatic and well known [CPRF] deputy in the Moscow City Duma, or Andrei Danilov, an interesting and popular intellectual from Yakutia. There are also new leaders emerging, including from within these parties. You have, for example, Anna Ochkina, who was one of the major voices of the left within A Just Russia but who left the party, making a public statement against the war. In that sense, while the leaders speak out in favour of the war, they are not supported by any serious forces on the ground. On the ground, the left is, I shouldn’t say it is “well”, but it is definitely alive, and it is definitely active and growing.

One thing to note is that a lot of people from the liberal opposition have left the country. The government publicly labelled a number of them “foreign agents”. Everyone knows that the next step after being labelled a foreign agent is that you are put in jail, which is why many have left. They have labelled me a foreign agent, I imagine with the intention of wanting me to leave, but I’m not going to leave. An interesting by-product of this policy has been that, while most of the leaders of the liberal opposition have left the country — with a few exceptions, such as Alexey

Navalny, who was already in jail, and Ilya Yashin, who was recently put in jail — those who have stayed in Russia are mostly from the left. So, interestingly, the left is now becoming a kind of hegemonic force within the anti-war movement.

The anti-war movement is real, even if it's been forced underground. And it is radicalising, because people are beginning to understand that it is not just about the war: it's about the political and social system. A very interesting sign of this is that segments of the liberal opposition that used to be very suspicious of anything left-wing, are now moving leftward. For example, Yashin recently declared that he had certain disagreements with Navalny because he himself identifies more as a person of the left, which was a surprise to us because we always thought of him as being a liberal. Another example is Yulia Galyamina, a very charismatic and important figure of the liberal opposition, who recently made a statement that her best friends in the movement are communists. There is definitely a shift to the left within the movement.

Finally, I want to turn to the West's aim for Russia and the issue of regime change. You wrote recently that while Western leaders “will not allow Russia to win the war ... they don't necessarily wish for a change of the Russian regime.” This seems to cut across the dominant narrative in the West, and even the Western left, that behind the US' motives in the Ukraine war is to weaken Russia and promote some kind of regime change. Why do you believe that they are not interested in changing the Russian regime?

Well, it depends on what you mean by regime change. If by regime change you simply mean changing the name of the president, then that is exactly what the West wants. They definitely want Putin to step down because Putin went too far, because Putin is totally unreliable, because Putin is toxic and, to some extent, he's crazy or at least unpredictable and dangerous. They want to get rid of him.

But do they want Russia to become a democratic, open society, dominated by people who are not corrupt and who care about the social and economic development of the country? I definitely doubt it. What they want is Putinism without Putin. They might also want some minor cosmetic changes, such as placing certain liberal economists in the government; although, it must be said, that the government is already dominated by neoliberal economists. All these economists, inside and outside the government, share the same views and approach to the economy. They all share the same idea of Russia being integrated into the global economy as a seller of raw materials and energy, and therefore increasingly dependent on Western markets.

The West definitely wants Putin to step down and the Russian elites want exactly the same thing — there is a total consensus on this. There is just one small problem:

Putin is not going to step down. Moreover, if and when he finally does step down — in whatever form this might take — it will not be the end of the story, as Western and Russian elites hope; instead, it will be the beginning of a much deeper crisis. By this I am not talking about Russia falling apart; I'm talking about social and political struggles within Russia for power and influence.

Real change means turning Russia into a democratic society, one dominated by domestic interests and not by the interests of foreign markets, foreign capital and Russian investment abroad, which is an important issue for Russian elites when it comes to decision-making. Russian society wants a different kind of economic development and people understand that this is necessary. This goes completely against the perspective envisaged by elites in Russia and the West.

In some sense, we have a situation that is very similar to the one Russia faced in 1916-17, when it was clear that the British and Germans were fed up with the tsar. This created a very strange situation, because the Germans and British were at war with each other, but they were in agreement that Nicolas II had to go. The Germans wanted this because they expected that Russia would then negotiate and get out of the war. The English expected a new regime to continue the war in a more effective manner. If you recall, Nicholas II resigned and then a revolution started — something that was not contemplated in either the plans of the Germans or British.

I think the situation today is very similar: they want Putin to go but they want the regime to stay largely intact, even if perhaps there might be a certain winding back in the level of authoritarianism to what existed before 2020. Essentially, a “return to normal” without Putin and without some of the more extreme repression and extreme militarisation. But it's not going to happen that way. The regime will collapse sooner or later — and probably sooner rather than later. But the important thing is that there is no going back to the *status quo ante*. Ukraine is going to undergo tremendous changes. And Russia will undergo even deeper changes. As a Belarusian comrade recently said to me, we — meaning Russians, Belarusians, all of us ex-Soviet Union and ex-Russian imperial subjects — have a good tradition: Every time we lose a war, we either start radical reforms or revolutions. ■

# **Feminist Anti-War Resistance**

## **‘Anti-war initiatives have experienced a big influx of activists’<sup>14</sup>**

*The following interview with Feministskoye protivoyennoye soprotivleniye (Feminist Anti-War Resistance, FAR) took place at the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023. The questions in the interview were formulated by Dick Nichols. The FAR activists who took part in the interview prefaced their answers with this comment: “Firstly, we would like to send our greetings to the readers of this interview. We are grateful that you are interested in anti-war resistance from Russia and Feminist Anti-War Resistance in particular. The interview questions were answered by several of our activists, who are immersed in the topics in different ways, so regard our answers as a chorus of anti-war voices.”*

**What has been the social impact of the introduction of the “partial mobilisation” (military call-up) introduced by Russian president Vladimir Putin on September 21, 2022, and still not officially terminated? Has it led to increased questioning of his motivation for the war?**

Whereas before the mobilisation the vast majority of voices against it were either anti-war activists or those with relatives in Ukraine, with the mobilisation the number of people for whom the war came home has increased. For many ethnic minorities (non-ethnic Russians, often non-Orthodox and/or non-Slavic) mobilisation day became a Saint Bartholomew’s massacre — people were visited at night, grabbed and taken away. In some cities, the exits were blocked so that people could not leave the places from where they would be sent to war. Many, many people urgently left Russia, for example, to Mongolia and Kazakhstan. But even more people could not leave Russia for various reasons. The mobilisation has mainly affected the poorest regions, or regions that are exploited by the government as colonies because of their resources. Indeed, the people from these republics are just a resource in the eyes of Moscow authorities.

These people, now fighting for themselves, have started looking for ways not to go to war and not to send their relatives to war. Thus, in the days since the mobilisation, the number of people who were willing to volunteer and become activists against the war has grown.

So, I think we can say that unrest and discontent are growing; anti-war initiatives both regional and global have experienced a big influx of activists since the mobilisation started. This has been expressed in increased dissemination of information about how not to go to war as well as more radical actions. For example, the number of arson attacks on military recruitment centres across Russia has also grown tremendously since the mobilisation began.

An October 2022 Vertska article on the call by Moscow municipal deputies for Putin's resignation said that, according to these deputies, their call represents what their electors want. On the other hand, official polling in Russia has Putin with over 80% support, and even independent polls like that of the Levada Centre still show large majority support for the president's "special military operation". Are these figures and the overwhelming vote for United Russia in the September 2022 local and regional elections an accurate gauge of Russian popular opinion?

Here is a very sad thing about dictatorships — under them polling simply does not work. If a "sociologist" calls you on the phone and asks for your opinion about the war, what would you do? The average Russian would hang up because they know that the poll could be rigged and that they might be prosecuted for their opinion. That, along with people not taking interest in politics at all, is a major problem. Our society is very atomised. Right now, the mission of anti-war organisations is to bring those atomised parts of the society together and show that in Russia there are people who actually do care about politics. In this context, concluding that Russians support or do not support the war can only be a subjective estimation. However, we do think that it is very concerning how a lot of people in Russia think that the war and politics in general just do not concern them.

The war has produced a big flow of Ukrainian migrants into the Russian Federation. How much of this is voluntary and how much is done under compulsion? What impact is it having inside Russia?

Human rights activist Svetlana Gannushkina estimates that there are around two million Ukrainians in Russia right now. I am not sure how many refugees came to Russia voluntarily and how many did not. I can say that situations are always different



have relatives in Russia and have a place to stay. And I also know situations when buses were hired, and people were put before a “choice”: “Either you put up with shelling and shooting or you go to Russia.”

In some cases, people are afraid of the language barrier, in others they see more obstacles to entering Europe and think, unwittingly, that Russia is more stable and the state will help, and in some cases Russia becomes a transit point for those who are going to travel further.

There is an opinion that after almost a year of the war, everyone who has wanted to leave Russia has already left, and that only collaborators with the Putin regime and traitors to Ukraine remain. But I completely disagree with this opinion, since a lot of people are simply not able to travel further: some only have money for food, some are too sick, some are old. Volunteers in Russia are doing everything they can, but their resources are not enough to get all the people to a safer place.

As for their influence inside Russia, I can only say that I saw a huge increase in support from Russian citizens for Ukrainian migrants. There are help groups and chats in almost every city, where people sometimes with opposing views on the war unite to help internally displaced people. Of course, in addition to humanitarian aid, anti-war volunteers use other methods as well. They often warn Ukrainian citizens that they are not safe here and help them leave. By contrast, volunteers who support the military help them to receive all sorts of papers for legalising their status and to get socially integrated in Russia. But it feels like there are far fewer pro-war volunteers in the total number, and volunteering remains almost the last legal avenue in Russia to support the citizens of Ukraine.

Many of the oligarchs who occupy the commanding heights of the Russian economy are suffering from the sanctions imposed by the Western governments, but they seem powerless to propose an alternative to Putin's regime. What divisions, if any, does FAR see within Russia's economic and political elite? Do they matter politically?

As of now, we really do not know much about the “split” in the elites. Russian independent media have reported that a lot of oligarchs do not support the war, but we really do not know anything more than that. Also, such people usually speak anonymously.

The Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy not only strongly supports the war, but it also acts to stifle any progressive initiative (such as for homosexual

marriage). Yet FAR sought to appeal to believers, particularly last Easter, on the grounds that they should be supporting the values of peace and solidarity. Are divisions growing within the church over the war?

In Russia, the church is a state institution and is deployed by the state. The highest ranks of the church are supported by the regime and receive bribes and continue to generate corruption. On behalf of the church, they block the law criminalising domestic violence and try to ban abortion. But at the same time, many believers share the faith and respect the church. Therefore, we will try to reach out to people who, because of their religious beliefs, think that murder is a terrible sin.

It is also important to note that in addition to the church in Russia, there are both mosques and Buddhist temples. If the religious elites support the war, then the lower ranks often oppose it, eventually being defrocked as priests and leaving the country due to pressure. For example, the honorary representative of the Dalai Lama in Russia, Erdni Ombadykov (who openly supports Ukraine), was included in the list of foreign agents. He also had to step down as a Lama of the Republic of Kalmykia. Patriarch Kirill recently fired a priest who prayed for “peace” instead of “victory”.

It is hard to avoid comparisons with other periods in Russian history when war gave rise to revolution or radical change, as with the Crimean, Russo-Japanese and First World Wars: an increasingly authoritarian and seemingly immovable regime has nowhere to retreat, and then gets overthrown. Does FAR think that such a scenario can be repeated as a result of the invasion of Ukraine?

We are absolutely sure that Putin’s regime will fall soon. Regardless of historical analogies, it is only a matter of time before people start protesting. When that happens, Putin will be unable to simultaneously fight the war and against his own citizens. However, we have reasonable doubts that violent revolution is even possible in the modern age. For a violent revolution to happen, several conditions must be met. First, there must be a big proportion of young men within the population. This is not the case for Russia. It was not the case even before the war (young men are actually the smallest population group in Russia), but right now young men are actively dying because of the war and mobilisation. Many young men have fled from the country for the same reasons.

Second, violent revolutions are done by people who went through military training. Again, this is not the case for Russia. Men tend to avoid serving in the army, and even those who serve in the army have little or no military training. The same goes for the mobilisation: people are thrown into the fight with almost no training and an immense proportion of mobilised men just die in the first encounter. So even if we consider the

scenario of military men returning from the war disillusioned with their government, the sad truth is that not very many of them will actually return. I draw your attention to the research done by journalists from Mediazona: they counted dead Russian soldiers using public sources only. They counted more than 12,500 dead on the Russian side. And these are deaths that we know of: the real number is probably at least five times greater. Third, people in Russia do not have experience of participating in politics. Remember that something that can be called a democracy existed in Russia for just a couple of years. After that, all we saw were stolen elections and repression. So, people in Russia are taught to not care about politics: “What is the point, if Putin will win anyway?” “If there is no way to influence political processes, why should I even try?” Those are very common thoughts among Russians. So, it is highly unlikely that Russians will jump from barely voting in elections to arming themselves to fight the dictatorship.

To summarise: we strongly believe that Putin’s regime will fall soon, one way or another. We have doubts about the scenario of violent revolution for multiple reasons. We think that massive peaceful protest is much more likely, and we know that whatever violence occurs will be done to protesters by the police.

What space is left for protest in Russia today? The picture we get from outside is of continually intensifying repression, but with some parts of the legal system still not doing the bidding of the repressive agencies. Putin’s repression seems to have driven the anti-war movement including FAR into a “battle for hearts and minds” in social media via the Telegram channel, the anti-war consciousness-raising groups (GRAS), chat groups, the distribution of *Zhenskaya pravda* (Women’s Truth) etc. Do you have a sense of what influence all this work is having?

The situation with protests in Russia is still very difficult. Since the war began, new repressive laws have been imposed in our jurisdiction — and they are adding new ones all the time. A lot of people who went out to protest the war and the mobilisation have left the country because of persecution and security concerns. The prominent forms of every day protest that we see now is something that James C. Scott called “weapons of the weak”. Amid the repression, people mostly protest in hiding — and a lot of the “protest” comes in small things. Of course, the government does not and cannot repress every single person with an anti-war position — the arrests and abuse are demonstrative and performative. That is not to say that they are not real: they are, and they hurt people and ruin their lives. But what the regime is trying to tell you is: “Hey — look, someone got prison time for anti-war stickers. This could happen to you!” It manipulates Russians by spreading fear. Whether that fear is justified is a very

difficult moral dilemma — there is no quick answer to it.

Nonetheless, we do see the impact of what we are doing as an anti-war organisation. We do all kinds of projects, from direct help to Ukraine (we have recently delivered a powerful generator to a hospital in Cherkassy) to cyber-activism. We try to speak to different audiences — for example, our monthly newspaper *Women's Truth* is targeted towards the older population that is often isolated from the world and that does not always have access to non-governmental media. The newspaper even has a crossword and anecdotes section, along with recipes — it appeals to older women. We cannot reveal how, but we are planning to spread *Women's Truth* more and on a larger scale. We also have a mothers' group inside FAR. We keep in touch with these women and help them as much as we can. A lot of them do not have much literacy in legal matters. One of the women we talked to could not find any information about her husband, and yet the information was literally one filled-out form away, but people do not always know that.

Of course, we try to battle the Kremlin's propaganda, but another mission of ours is to unite people who already oppose the government. Our activists do all sorts of things, from putting up anti-war propaganda around the town to taking part in cyber protests. We have recently started a campaign against militarist propaganda: activists put up on Google Maps posts with anti-war slogans and photos of tanks covered in blood. The Kremlin uses a lot of the old Soviet tanks as a propaganda tool, making the whole concept of war sacred. It functions as a public political religion.

Another line of our work is to support activists and people who oppose the war. It is vital that people feel that what they are doing and saying is important and it has an actual effect. A lot of people get disappointed and lose all motivation. So, we create space for them so they are surrounded by supportive, like-minded, people. We also provide free psychological support groups for those who need it.

Protests against the introduction of the partial mobilisation have been mostly concentrated in the non-Russian republics, oblasts and krais. Does FAR have a sense of how deep disaffection with the regime has become in areas like Dagestan, Buryatia, Tyva, etc?

I think, to understand people's state of mind, that I need to tell you a little about the "regions" — that is the name of the republics and territories that are not Moscow. To understand how great the difference is between people from the capital and the regions, it is important to grasp that the expansion of Moscow and conquest of regions began from 1490. It was often accompanied by the genocide of the local population and the destruction of the centres of learning and local traditions of the indigenous

peoples. Enforced Christianisation went along with colonisation and slavery. Uprisings were suppressed in the harshest possible way. In the 20th century, we saw the first attempts to eliminate entire republics from the Russian empire. The proto-democratic parliamentary republics were suppressed. Then repression of activists began, accompanied by mass executions and deportations of peoples in which 50% to 90% of the deported peoples died due to government-created famine. Local republican elites were murdered on account of their pan-Mongolism, while native Arabic languages were first Latinised and then made Cyrillic. Many local scientists and creative artists were sent to concentration camps and died there.

The Soviet Union used the propaganda of a multinational people, “brothers” in a large family, while reproducing the same empire and repressing its colonies. We can hear the same propaganda today.

Modern Russia has not changed at all. When the Soviet Union collapsed, many republics declared independence and asserted their sovereignty. However, Moscow was not ready to let go of the important resources it had stolen for centuries. This is how the mass bombing of peaceful cities in Chechnya and the genocide of Chechens who wanted independence happened. People are still tortured and killed there, and money from the centre goes to maintain this oppressive regime. It is why uncontrolled and unrepressed internal banditry appeared in other republics.

Systemic racism grew every year, and in the 2000s a lot of activists from the oppressed nations were killed. Ecosystems were destroyed and indigenous activists who opposed the ecocide of their lands were either killed or forced out of the country through the destruction of their villages and threats to kill their children.

“We only rent apartments for Slavs”, “Go back to your native republic, migrants”: such humiliation and the creation of conditions so that people either cannot speak their native language or are made to feel that using it is humiliating — these are things with which we live all the time.

The regions have been deprived of autonomy. Tatarstan was deprived of its sovereignty this year. Imagine an independent parliament depriving itself of its own independence! Because of the terror in the 2000s, the republics were deprived of elections and, after that, all protest was severely suppressed.

In the republics, the vast majority of people survive on the minimum wage. It happens for a lot of reasons, including the fact that there is often no industrial development. Sometimes you only have enough for food and utility bills.

So now, once you understand that many are raised in fear, violence and without money, and the opportunity arises to see that this is not so all over the world and a new war begins, accompanied by constant propaganda, people volunteer to enlist.

We are the main “cannon fodder” used by the Kremlin — a resource, not a people. And the war is again taking place for the same reason as all of Moscow’s wars of colonisation — the former colony does not want to remain a colony. Not in the least. As a result, many activists from the regions are fully aware of what Russia is trying to do to Ukraine, and are on its side.

Putin successfully taps into an intense and broadly felt resentment that the “collective West” has never really treated Russia as an equal partner, but as an adversary that was defeated with the “end of Communism”. How does FAR try to counter this resentment-based Russian patriotism?

Present-day Russia is a direct successor of the Soviet regime. The Kremlin’s national idea is based on the past — Russian propaganda tries to unite the people around the holiday of “Victory Day”, May 9. Using the narrative of victory instead of grief and remembrance eliminates the possibility of any adequate policy of historical memory. As a result, a counter-memory appears. And here, saying anything against the government’s memorial policy is regarded as a moral crime. Opposing its propaganda means profaning a past that is considered sacred and untouchable. Basing the Russian national idea on it is worse than absurd. Moreover, the regime uses the memory of World War II to justify new wars! This militaristic propaganda is closely tied to what is happening right now.

Our recent anti-militarism campaign, “Tanks in blood”, is meant to confront this patriotic propaganda. Russian towns are literally flooded with old Soviet military equipment — in parks, squares, and avenues. Our idea was to show the real face of this equipment — as steeped in blood. We uploaded posts and photos of tanks with blood photoshopped on them to Google Maps. Of course, it is important that we do not actually defile the memory of World War II, so we accompany those posts with texts like these: “Our warriors fought for peace in 1941-1945. Now Russia is sending its people to death and murder! Stop war against Ukraine!”

FAR has given a voice to women from non-Russian regions and sought to support their demands and aspirations against Russian chauvinism, paternalism and Russification. Does FAR seek to create cells in non-Russian territories, or does it look to link up with indigenous anti-war movements there?

Are you talking about non-Russian territories in the context of ethnicity? Then it is important to pay attention to the distinction between “Russians” as citizens of Russia and Russians as an ethnic group and remember that imperialism and monolithism get reinforced by all the major world languages. It is also important to note that we do not

exist as separate categories: we are regional activists, and we are also FAR. We, as queer, indigenous activists, struggle to be heard. Despite all the repression, our experience is unique, and yet we are not heard enough. The voices of the capitals are still heard more than us.

Therefore, as FAR we also support other regional initiatives — the Free Buryatia Foundation, Free Kalmykia, Novaya Tuva and many others. Get acquainted with them and learn more about their resistance and what the real Russia is like. I think it is important to hear this message, so you begin to understand why we support Ukraine and how important that is.

**Do you think your work, including in the Temporary Accommodation Centres and helping Ukrainian women and families leave Russia, is helping change the perception common in Ukraine that “all Russians support Putin”?**

Our mission is not to change the perception that all Russians support Putin, especially if it is a perception coming from Ukrainians. That is simply not our goal. As we said, there are no real poll results or statistics we could trust right now. We try to focus on helping people instead of proving to them that we are not as bad as they think we are.

**FAR activists promptly signed the declaration of Ukrainian feminists supporting Ukraine’s right to self-defence and opposing a purely pacifist response to Putin’s invasion. FAR was also inspired by the role of women in the Belarusian protests of 2020-21. How is FAR looking to strengthen collaboration and solidarity with Belarusian and Ukrainian feminists?**

We do not want to force any cooperation with Ukrainian feminists — that would be violent and insensitive in a time of war. However, we do follow their activities attentively via social media, try to support their demands in the international arena whenever we can, amplify their voices by translating their manifestos and posts for our Russian-language channels, and think of other ways that we can be useful without being intrusive, like fundraising or sharing posts on social media.

We try to be proactive but not violent. We are also very cautious about public events which include activists from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus together. We have a rule to write to participants from Ukraine and Belarus before an event to make sure they feel comfortable with sharing space with Russians, and we offer to withdraw our participation if they are not OK with it. Unfortunately, not all event organisers show this sensitivity: that is why we developed that rule.

Vika Kas, the FAR delegate to the very male August 31-September 2, 2022 Free Russia congress in Vilnius, conveyed quite a negative impression in her report on the event. What possibilities for collaboration with the Russian Action Committee, organisers of the congress and “big names” like Gary Kasparov, do you see? How can the segments of the anti-Putin opposition come together? We do not need to “come together”. There are dozens of grassroots anti-war initiatives in Russia. Some are radical, some are moderate. Some are anonymous, others operate openly. All those initiatives have different target audiences and different channels to access those audiences. We at FAR strongly believe in diversity. Diversity is better than uniformity. Uniformity leads to exclusion and therefore it is limited in its viewpoints and methods. So, Gary Kasparov can do whatever he thinks is right and maybe get some attention. But we strongly doubt that young anti-war women will listen to him, and we strongly doubt that Kasparov even has anything to say to them. Not to mention the Russian LGBTIQ+ community and national minorities.

What we do need is open dialogue about strategies and methods: not to come to a unified “standard”, but to share best practices and help each other to create best strategies for each and every one of us. And this is exactly what we do and how we build our communication with other anti-war initiatives.

FAR is striving to build a coalition of all the victims of Putin’s regime of great Russian chauvinism — women, LGBTIQ+ communities, non-Russian nationalities within the Russian Federation, and democratic-minded people in general. How does FAR see this coalition emerging? Is the perspective for it to eventually have a party-political expression? Might that mean that FAR might eventually be part of an initiative at the level of representative politics?

Yes, it could be so. We do not know for sure what we will be in the future and what the future will look like. We have to take into account that we live in a situation of permanent ambiguity. But yes, we want to be representatives of different discriminated groups and promote progressive politics in Russia. ■



# Kirill Medvedev

## **‘The decolonisation agenda is being actively discussed in opposition milieus’<sup>15</sup>**

*Moscow-based poet, translator, and activist Kirill Medvedev, of the Rossiyskoye sotsialisticheskoye dvizheniye (Russian Socialist Movement, RSD), speaks to Federico Fuentes about Putin’s war on Ukraine and anti-war resistance at home.*

### **Could you begin by telling us a bit about the Russian Socialist Movement?**

RSD was formed in 2011 through the merger of two Trotskyist groups. The RSD is a broad left organisation, whose membership ranges from progressive communists to social democrats. We played an active part in the anti-Putin protests of 2012, representing the left-wing of this opposition movement.

The RSD has always been interested in combining a traditional class agenda with issues of gender inequality, ecology and the right to the city — in theory and practice. We have sought to criticise the reactionary part of the Soviet legacy while appropriating its progressive side.

As an organisation we have collaborated with independent trade unions, participated in environmental, urban and feminist initiatives, set up reading groups, run in municipal elections, and supported like-minded people contesting city and federal election campaigns. The RSD was part of a network that campaigned for leftist candidate Mikhail Lobanov in the 2021 Duma elections. His victory over the [Putin] propagandist Yevgeny Popov, though stolen by the authorities, was an inspiring event for the Russian opposition.

Today, part of our organisation is located inside the Russian Federation, while another part is located outside.

**What position has RSD taken to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine? What, in your opinion, was the main driving force behind the invasion?**

We consider this war to be an act of imperialist aggression by the Putin regime against Ukraine.

Putin's main task today is to strengthen his regime in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election in order to be re-elected or be able to appoint a reliable successor. In 2021, Putin's rating reached the lowest level it had during his entire time in power.

In the place of pro-Western liberals and pro-Soviet conservative Communists who fight among themselves, a populist movement has started to emerge in recent years. It has a large level of youth participation; an anti-corruption, redistributive and decentralist agenda; and the capacity to mobilise people in the streets and win elections. The regions have also become more and more active.

At the same time, Putin saw Ukraine increasingly moving out of Russia's sphere of influence and feared that the spirit of the [2014] Maidan [rebellion] could spill over into Russia. To regain his popularity, he decided to reassert himself in the role of "collector of Russian lands" — a role he had begun to assert after 2014.

The political justification thus became, apparently, the main one. The benefits that certain sections of Russian business derive from the war — seizure of Ukrainian enterprises and fertile lands, export of metal, money for the military-industrial complex — are important, but most businesses have suffered as a result of the war and do not support this escalation.

### What can you tell us about the state of anti-war organising?

There are several types of resistance. First, there are peaceful actions carried out by individuals or informal groups: primarily individual pickets or anti-war graffiti. Second, there is violent resistance: actions such as setting fire to military recruitment centres or damaging railroad tracks. Anarchist groups have largely taken responsibility for these. Third, there are groups that support mobilised men, demanding their return and searching for the missing.

Women play a huge role in public resistance. Feminist Anti-War Resistance has greatly helped those resisting in Russia and those forced to flee the country. Disaffection with the draft in some regions, such as Dagestan, has led to protests in which women play the leading role. The Council of Mothers and Wives — composed of women who are trying to save their husbands and sons from mobilisation or calling for them to be returned home — is actively growing. This initiative is of great concern to the authorities because it appeals to the deepest layers of the masses, to those who are just beginning to be politicised.

The victims of this war in Russia are the poorest strata. However, participation and losses in this war for the "Russian world" are symbolically and demographically

more painful for non-titular [minority nationalities] and small-in-number [indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East] communities. The decolonisation agenda is being actively discussed in this opposition milieu.

In recent years, we have seen steps taken by authorities to promote Russo-centrism and consolidate it legally. For example, according to an amendment to the constitution, Russian language speakers have become a “state-forming people”. The war against Ukraine is a further radical and very dangerous step in this direction. Russian socialists face the difficult task of deconstructing Russia’s imperial matrix and supporting the right of peoples to real self-determination, while offering a common social, class platform. We need to ensure the decolonisation agenda does not transform into bloody clashes over borders of supposedly “ancestral” territories, but rather into a common struggle against the parasitic oligarchy, imperial racism and patriarchy.

### The main trade union federations support the war. Is there any sign of worker anti-war or union organising under conditions of war?

The war is supported by pro-government unions. Despite the war, independent unions continue to stand up for workers’ rights that have been violated at an even greater rate since the war began. Repression against unionists has escalated, but this is usually not directly related to the war.

Kirill Ukraintsev, a leader of the Courier trade union, has been in jail since April [2022] for organising protests. In December [2022], the Courier union held a strike in several regions. There has been repression against the medical workers’ union, Action, one of the most active independent unions. Anton Orlov, Action coordinator in Bashkortostan, is in jail on a trumped-up fraud charge. Vladimir Baranov, the head of Action in St. Petersburg, has been interrogated and searched. Lobanov, who I mentioned before, is a leader of the University Solidarity trade union. He has just served 15 days in jail for “resisting police” during a search of his apartment. [In 2022], he was sentenced twice for a social media post that said “No to War” and for one about the class character of Putin’s war.

Trade unions, like environmental movements, remain one of the hubs of self-organisation and collective action in the country.

### From your vantage point in Russia, how do you view the issues of arms delivery to Ukraine, the conflict in Donbas and NATO, which have been focuses of debate in the Western left?

Ukraine, as a country subject to intervention, has every right to receive military aid from anyone — just like the Kurds, and just like Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s.

Especially as Russia has also been buying weapons from the West for years. And the desire of Russia's neighbours — traumatised by their history of interactions with Russia — to join NATO is quite understandable. The reality is that Russia's current war against Ukraine has one initiator: the Russian leadership. Its roots, among other things, lie in reanimated imperial stereotypes, claiming that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are one people. But put in the historical perspective of the 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the NATO leadership bears enormous responsibility for the fact that we are once again facing the possibility of global military confrontation. NATO should have been disbanded after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Its continued existence carried a direct message that there was no alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

This lack of alternative gave rise to post-Soviet neoliberalism in Russia, and eventually to Putin and his war. As a result, a false, reactionary alternative to liberal globalisation has emerged: the “multipolar world” project that Putin and his associates in various other countries dream of today. This is a world in which a few major players divide the world into spheres of influence, subjugate neighbouring countries, do not interfere with each other's ability to exploit their own peoples, and help each other to suppress internal discontent. All of this is done in the name of some special, supposedly inherent “national” or “civilisational” values. Putin saw the war with Ukraine as a step in this direction. It is monstrous that this is happening under anti-fascist and even anti-colonial slogans, which many take at face value.

As to the Donbas, this is a painful issue. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and parts of Donbas, taking advantage of the fact that many Russian-speaking Ukrainians in these territories were concerned about the rise of the far-right after Maidan. Russia's invasion led to about a million Donbas residents fleeing to unoccupied territories in Ukraine. Pro-Moscow dictatorships were established in the so-called “people's republics” of Donetsk and Lugansk, while Ukraine conducted an “anti-terrorist operation” to regain the territories, killing residents. A full-scale war was unleashed by Russia in 2022, ostensibly in the interests of the inhabitants of the so-called “people's republics”. But it brought them nothing except more death, destruction, and forced mobilisation. Russia should eventually give up its claim to these territories. But peace in Crimea and Donbas after the war, just as peace in other war-torn places, is a concern for the international community. It should also be a concern for the international left.

The great question for the left and for 21st century democrats is how to ensure that the inevitably growing agenda of identities, of self-determination for different groups, communities, territories and nations does not get in the way but rather helps solve global problems related to climate, inequality and the new arms race. [Kurdish revolutionary] Abdullah Ocalan, reflecting on the Kurdish national project, has written

about the concept of “Democratic Confederation”. I think its relevance in this context will increase. However, the experience of 20th century socialism tells us that there is no single recipe for all countries and continents. ■



# **Voices from beyond**





## Zofia Malisz (Poland)

**‘There are several imperialisms at play in our part of Europe; we cannot afford to take sides’<sup>16</sup>**

*Polish left-wing party Lewica Razem (Left Together) International Office member Zofia Malisz talks with Federico Fuentes about the party’s history, Polish politics and Lewica Razem’s views on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Lewica Razem is commonly abbreviated to Razem.*

While a lot has been written about new left forces in Western Europe such as Podemos and Syriza, much less is known about forces in Eastern Europe, such as Razem. Could you start by telling us a bit about Razem’s history and how it views itself politically?

Razem was formed in 2015 by a group of leftist activists with years of experience in the Polish green and feminist movements, along with members of the Young Socialists.

The impetus for creating a new party was twofold. One was the frustration that emerged under the liberal Donald Tusk government (2007-14). Whenever voices started to demand the government focus on social spending instead of cuts and privatisations, Tusk’s response was to say Poland was still in its transformation stage [towards a market economy] and that now was not the time to build up a welfare state. Frustration grew as neoliberal policies were implemented at breakneck speed to indulge business elites, while people were denied even modest social benefits and public services were being dismantled. All this occurred as anti-austerity protests were taking place in Greece, something we supported and that inspired Razem.

The other major factor was the protests against the Iraq war and against Poland’s participation in the occupation of Afghanistan. Several activists who went on to build Razem came from these protest movements. The revelations of alleged illegal US

prisons in Poland used to torture al-Qaeda members created huge outrage. Seeing the Polish government bow down to US imperialism unchallenged — and in fact encouraged by the mainstream, including former Solidarnosc (Solidarity) activists — fuelled frustration on the left. Razem was formed as an expression of this anger and frustration that had built up during the transformation process.

This particularly still concerns the young. Unlike the old Communist establishment or the new liberal elites aligned with business, they did not get the opportunity to enrich themselves during the transformation period. Entering professional life, let alone starting a family, has become — and still is — a very difficult thing if you are living precariously. Our co-leaders Magda Biejat and Adrian Zandberg have been highlighting the housing situation, particularly as rent and real estate prices have risen dramatically. Poland is also facing depopulation, with the abortion ban discouraging women from getting pregnant, and high cost of living pressures, which prevent young people from starting an independent life.

In terms of Razem's politics, I would say one difference between Razem and much of the Western left is that we do not use ideologised language and instead communicate left values organically. This is because, after the 1990s [with the fall of the Communist regime], even using the word “socialism” became problematic. There was a backlash that the right wing and neoliberals gladly exploited to discredit any ideas of a social state. This happened despite the fact that Poland's socialist tradition is much older than the Eastern bloc's existence and played a hugely significant and positive role in the building of the Polish independent state. Not to mention that, contrary to what conservative ideologues want you to believe, the ideals of Solidarity were socialist.

Razem was [also] inspired by the modern left approach adopted by Podemos, who demonstrated how to communicate socialist ideas in a different way. [Podemos] showed that it was very important to find new ways to break up right-wing duopolies. In the case of Polish politics, we have a duopoly between the liberal and conservative right that dominates the scene. We had to first bring back the left and insert left issues into the centre of Polish political debate. We had to bring back social protest and unionising into everyday Polish political practice — and we succeeded. These were our motivations.

Since then we have engaged in an at times dramatic fight for space on the terrain of this duopoly. The duopoly manifests itself as a war of right-wing tribes that is a source of sustenance to their elites. So, it was vital for us to avoid the trap of engaging in empty arguments. Polish liberals reduce every social-political question to whether this helps defeat the conservatives, and vice versa, while never considering any problems on its merit. The Polish people are tired of this ritualistic fighting. They appreciate the

fact that our six MPs instead focus on talking about the issues. Parliamentary speeches by Zandberg are something of a hotly anticipated public event because they give a rare sense of getting real among all this ruckus. They resonate because there is anger and people want solutions and real action. And they know they can depend on us for those. People value Razem MPs showing up early at a strike to support workers' demands and to facilitate bringing the entitled bosses to the table. This is where we were able to make a difference in several industrial actions in recent years.

### Poland is often grouped as part of a conglomerate of far-right authoritarian countries in Eastern Europe. How accurate is this? What can you tell us about the current government?

The same year Razem was formed, a conservative Christian government was elected. They found that the key to winning was to offer something that people wanted, some kind of social benefit — in this case a child allowance — but which the liberals had been refusing to give. The conservative government only secured a majority because it incorporated social elements into their agenda. Polish society, when asked about the policies they prefer, most often point to a form of social democracy with solid public services. The conservatives have exploited this need to their political benefit — but have clearly failed to deliver any comprehensive social agenda.

In any case, it is clear that to grab power they did not campaign on banning abortion or dismantling the judicial branch of the state. But right after they came to power, they attacked human rights and the state's institutions. They started stirring up culture wars in later campaigns, for example, scapegoating and harassing LGBTIQ+ people. Yes, these policies are supported by the Catholic Church. The conservative majority owes the Church huge favours — a lot of this stuff happens as a form of a clientelist exchange between the Church and the government. But these are not policies that have majority support. Polls show the majority of the Polish people want legalisation of abortion and civil unions for same-sex couples. Polish society has been secularising dramatically in recent years. The conservatives have been losing this battle and the rabid reaction of fundamentalist groups embedded in the government's environment reflects this.

Unlike in Hungary, the Polish government has not been able to undermine the electoral system, and while attempts to take over the judiciary have been largely successful, they faced popular protest. Moreover, due to the European Union's resistance to accepting these illegal reforms, the government has hit a wall of Polish EU-enthusiasm. This is the major difference with [Viktor Orbán's] Hungary. The government here was not able to find an easy way around the fact that people won't

support any hint of “Polexit”. Neither will Razem, by the way, as we believe the EU badly needs social and democratic reform, but that Poland should stay and contribute to fostering integration and partnership on the continent. This fact about Poland being pro-European integration helped defeat the government’s attacks on our checks and balances.

The result was that all the Orbanite moves the government carried out, including the persecution of women and LGBTIQ+ people, sparked a wave of unprecedented protest. The protests against the abortion ban were huge and spanned all levels of society. This caused a dramatic dip in the polls and the conservatives are unlikely to win a parliamentary majority in [the 2023] elections.

As to the idea of Eastern Europe as essentially authoritarian and full of far-right nationalists, I would say this is the result of decades of dismissing Eastern Europe agency. It is often the default, convenient portrayal in the media that flatters egos in the West. We all know what trouble Western European countries are in regarding right-wing threats, look at Italy or France with [Giorgia] Meloni and [Marine] Le Pen, or the recent plot by German extremists to overthrow the system. But somehow the global media and Russian propaganda manage to draw exclusive attention to right-wing authoritarian tendencies in Eastern Europe, obscuring the fact that there are left movements and a progressive civil society, and disregarding the emancipatory and democratising impulse that is well alive in the people. This contributes to the image of Eastern Europe as an especially conservative backwater, hostile to progressive ideas, which is not really the case and certainly is not a constant.

Of course, there are elements of this, but it is being incredibly exaggerated in the West, including within the Western left. Look at Slovenia with Levica (The Left), Croatia with Mozemo (We Can!), Latvia with Progresīvie (The Progressives) or Poland with Razem, and you will discover inspiring left movements implementing progressive change in their country and municipal politics — and there will be more surprises like that in the future which should be acknowledged. Particularly regarding Ukraine, it is vital that movements such as Social Movement are supported in the context of resistance and rebuilding after Russian aggression is defeated.

### How did Razem respond to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine? Why does Razem insist on the need to come to grips with Russian imperialism?

Razem had no doubts about how to react given our countries’ common historic experience with Russian imperialism. We had absolutely no doubts that this invasion represented an existential threat to Ukraine, that there could be no compromise, and that our party’s reaction was crucial.

Unfortunately, we were very disappointed with progressive organisations, including ones that at the time we belonged to, that kept silent right up to and after the invasion, and even after the Bucha massacre. This was disappointing but also, I admit, we may have been a bit blind to an obvious tendency that exists within part of the left to overemphasise US imperialism while letting Russian imperialism off the hook. It quickly became clear a big part of that left is not able to accept what for us are two existential issues: that Ukraine is a sovereign state and that there is such a thing as Russian imperialism.

In contrast, representatives of the left in Poland (Razem), Finland (Vasemmistoliitto, Left Alliance), Lithuania (LKairisjs aljansas, Left Alliance), Czech Republic (Budoucnost, Alliance For The Future; Jsme Levice, The Left) and Romania (Demos, Democracy and Solidarity Party) met in Warsaw on March 8 with representatives of Social Movement to listen to them and ask them what they needed. The Danish left (Enhedslisten, Red-Green Alliance) was not present at the meeting but later indicated their support.

It became clear that we should campaign, first, to support the left and Ukraine's armed resistance. This was done against considerable pushback from the so-called anti-war movement in imperial or post-imperial Western societies. We also often found that Ukrainian leftists had to fight even for their right to speak at events organised by the Western left. So this was a struggle and remains a vital point: to assert the existence and amplify the voice of the Ukrainian left. Their voice, once heard, inevitably cuts through all propaganda smokescreens — they lead a righteous fight for self-determination against an imperialist aggressor, no doubt about it.

Since then, the unity initiated in Warsaw has extended to other Nordic and Central European left parties, and more recently to left groups in the Balkans. We are building a network to share information not only about our common experience with regards to Russian imperialism but also regarding the process of harsh neoliberal transformation in states of the former Eastern bloc.

Together with Social Movement and other allies such as the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) or the Swedish Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) we also launched a campaign to cancel Ukraine's debt, which is restricting Ukraine's war efforts and the ability to maintain its economy afloat. We have had some successes: a bill has been passed in the US House of Representatives calling on the US government to influence lenders on behalf of Ukraine, and the issue has also been raised in the UK and European parliament. This is a campaign we hope to build on as an example of concrete solidarity and outward campaigning. We prefer to offer concrete solidarity and work with parties, trade unions and movements that are accountable to voters, members and the public.

Debates on realist geopolitics regarding multipolarity perhaps drive book sales, Twitter likes and invitations to panel debates, but they do not help the Ukrainian people who are fighting off the genocidal aggression of a neighbour who is wagering on neocolonialism in the 21st century.

**Putin's invasion has clearly been exploited by Western powers to boost defence spending and strengthen NATO. How does Razem view the issue of NATO expansionism and NATO's role in the current conflict?**

We are clear that the influence of Western militarism is not welcome in Poland. But we recognise that we are in a complex situation. Unlike the left that operates in the heart of an empire, the left in our part of Europe cannot afford to take a purely ideological stance that is divorced from the security realities of the peoples of our region.

On the one hand, given the lack of a proper European security architecture, NATO currently represents the only guarantee of protection for Polish citizens. The vast majority of Poles want this protection because they know the threat Russian imperialism poses. That is why I do not think that we can honestly talk about NATO expansionism in our region. Instead, what we had was countries desperately applying to join NATO in the 1990s, while the US was initially not so favourable to us joining. For people in our region, Russian expansionism is the existential threat. And it is Russia that is expanding towards and across our region — by invading Ukraine. If you look honestly at the history of NATO-Russia relations regarding Europe, you will see it was Russia who regularly stepped forward first with the will to escalate. Politically, you can speak of appeasement regarding Western European policy towards Russia in recent decades. Militarily, regarding troop and weapon deployments, you cannot speak of provocation.

On the other hand, Razem has actively opposed any Polish participation in NATO's contemptuous, hardly legal, interventions, such as in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, etc. Any arbitrary action that is motivated by primitive extractionism or forced upon the alliance members via political pressure from the US is for us the true meaning of "NATO expansionism". And we oppose it. We are also clear that such actions have only emboldened Russia and provided it with precedents to carry out its own brazen imperialist actions.

Razem is aware that there are several imperialisms at play in our part of Europe and that we cannot afford to take sides supporting one imperialism over another. ■

# **Tobias Drevland Lund (Norway)**

## **‘We need a Nordic Defence Alliance that can stake out a third position between Russia and the US’<sup>17</sup>**

*Tobias Drevland Lund, an MP for Norway’s Rødt (Red Party) speaks to Federico Fuentes about the party’s rise and stance towards Russia’s war on Ukraine. Lund represents the electoral district of Telemark in Norway’s Storting (parliament) and sits on the Nordic Council, an advisory body for Nordic inter-parliamentary cooperation.*

While a lot is known about radical left forces in Western Europe, such as Podemos and Syriza, much less is known about the Nordic radical left. Could you tell us a bit about the rise of the Red Party?

The Red Party was founded in 2007. It was formed out of a merger of two different parties. One was the Arbeidernes Kommunistparti (Workers’ Communist Party), a traditionally Maoist party. The Workers’ Communist Party did not stand in elections, seeing itself instead as an activist party with a strong focus on trade unions. While historically it played an important role in many workers’ conflicts, following the fall of the Soviet Union, the Workers’ Communist Party went into decline. The other party was the Rød Valgallianse (Red Electoral Alliance), a left-wing populist party that ran in elections.

The Red Party was established with the goal of building a modern, radical and socialist movement for change in Norwegian politics. We took inspiration from other European left-wing populist and socialist forces, like Podemos and Syriza which you mentioned. We also took a lot of inspiration from the Danish Red Green Alliance: we see ourselves as their Norwegian counterpart. We have a lot of contact with them to strategise and develop common party programs and policies together.

It took us ten years to build up our party to the point of being able to win seats in parliament. We first entered the Norwegian parliament in the 2017 elections, with our

party leader winning a seat. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, we passed the national 4% threshold to obtain proportional representation — becoming the first new party to surpass the threshold since its introduction in 1989 — and as a result won 8 seats from across the whole country.

Over this period of time, the Red Party has also experienced an important growth in membership: we have gone from something like 1500 members when I joined the party in 2010 to about 14,000 members. Today, we have a much stronger organisation with numerous elected local councillors.

The rise of the Red Party can in part be explained by the decline of the social democratic Labour Party, which has dominated Norwegian politics since World War II. We have been able to reach out to disappointed social democratic voters and unionists who have historically been social democrats but who have seen their party move to the right, just like Labour parties in Britain and Australia. These voters want an alternative. Our aim is to build a strong, grassroots socialist alternative.

I am optimistic of a bright future for left socialist parties in Europe, particularly if we can learn from each other and meet the fall of the social democratic parties with the rise of radical left parties. Given the rise of the far-right and the cost-of-living crisis people are facing, we need a radical left more than ever.

**Could you outline to us the Red Party's stance on Russia's war against Ukraine, particularly as it has evolved since the invasion to the new position statement adopted at your recent congress in April 2023?**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine shocked the left in Europe and across the world. Grappling with Russia's invasion has been quite difficult and something we have had to collectively think through as a party. For example, the Red Party was initially against delivering weapons to Ukraine because we thought it would make us a co-participant in the war. We were worried that Russia would sanction Norway or even attack us given it was so difficult to know at the time what the endgame in all this was. However, after a year of discussions within the party — and in light of how the Ukraine war has developed — we saw it necessary to support Norway supplying weapons so that Ukrainians can fight back against the invaders.

To be clear, we never opposed Ukraine getting weapons, but we thought Norway could play another role, a diplomatic role in the conflict given our relationship with Russia. This position, however, has proven to be wrong.

Of course, all of this was a very big discussion within the Red Party. This is understandable as, historically, we have been very anti-US and anti-NATO. For some members, taking the stance we did was difficult to accept. But, in the end, we got an



agreement based on an understanding that we want peace — but a just peace for Ukraine. This means providing Ukrainian people with weapons they need to defend themselves against the war crimes and indiscriminate bombings being carried out by Russia. It was a very difficult discussion, but I think we came out of the convention as comrades with a common position to move forward with.

**The statement does draw a line at sending aircrafts and tanks. Was this part of finding a consensus position or is there a sense that such weapons constitute crossing a certain line?**

There was consensus on this issue because we believe that providing tanks and aircraft will further escalate the war and we do not want Norway to play a part in that. As the Red Party, we agree with Norway supplying defensive weapons to shoot down missiles but see tanks and aircrafts as crossing a line, which is something we need to be very careful about.

**At the same time, the Red Party continues to believe Norway can play an important role in diplomatic peace efforts? Why is this the case?**

We believe that we can take diplomatic actions while simultaneously providing Ukrainians with the weapons they need to defend themselves. We can do both; it is what other countries like France and Spain are doing.

Moreover, we believe Norway can play a special role in this conflict as a neighbouring country that has not been at war with Russia for more than a thousand years. Even during the Cold War, Norway had quite a good relationship with Russia. Today, Norway has, on the one hand, taken a strong stance against Putin's authoritarian leadership but, on the other hand, had a balanced relationship with Russia. It is not only in Russia's but also in Norway's interest to ensure that the Nordic region is not militarised and peace is kept in our part of the world.

We believe Norway should be playing a more proactive role when it comes to bringing about diplomatic solutions. Even NATO's general secretary Jens Stoltenberg has said this war is not going to end on the battlefield but at the negotiating table: that is where all wars finally end up, and this conflict is no different. Unfortunately, Norway has not been proactive enough in advocating for peace; it has been too passive, relying too much on the European Union which has not been moving quickly enough. We need to push harder for peace.

We have taken action together with Finland's Left Alliance, Sweden's Left Party and the Danish Red Green Alliance. As members of the Nordic Green Left Alliance, our MPs on the Nordic Council sought to pass a resolution ensuring that Nordic countries remain nuclear free. Sweden and Finland joining NATO cannot be used as

an excuse to store nuclear weapons in the Nordic region. Unfortunately, this proposal was rejected. But we will continue to push for actions to promote peace rather than further escalate the war — which is critical given the very real fear of a nuclear war outbreak. We will continue to work with left parties in Europe and in the Nordic countries to push for more actions that help ease tensions.

**Putin's invasion has clearly been exploited by Western powers to strengthen NATO and boost defence spending. What is the Red Party's view on NATO and its role in the current conflict?**

NATO's role in the Ukraine conflict is obvious: they have a self-interest in Ukraine winning and seeing Russia weakened as a result of the war. And before the war, I think NATO should have taken a different stance towards Russia. So, it is not the case that NATO did nothing wrong before the outbreak of war. But it is Russia and Putin's fault alone that the war happened; it was Putin who ordered the invasion and killing of civilians. Fault for this war lies solely on Putin and Russia's side: no security interests, no spheres of interest or other pretexts can justify a war of aggression.

In terms of the Red Party's position on NATO, while leaving NATO remains our goal, we are not in a position to push to leave NATO now, given the current situation. Until we have a strong enough defence force to stand on our own, we do not think Norway can leave NATO. I still believe leaving NATO is the right position. We don't have any expectations of changing NATO, given it is an imperialistic tool of the United States. But leaving NATO is not something we can do right now.

In place of NATO, we have promoted the idea of forming a Nordic Defence Alliance. We believe this is the best solution for Nordic countries: to stand together, as a neutral bloc, and stake out a third position between Russia and the US. Unfortunately, the possibility of a Nordic Defence Alliance is more unlikely than ever due to Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Instead, as a result of the invasion, Sweden and Finland have joined NATO.

In terms of military spending, the Red Party agrees with Norway spending more money on its own military, because we need a stronger defence force if we want to leave NATO. If we are going to have a reliable defence policy that people in Norway can believe in, then we need to have a strong defence force, given our location on Russia's border. We need to be able to show Norwegians that we take security and defence seriously. Together with the other Nordic countries — which currently spend more on defence than Norway — we believe we can forge a Nordic Defence Alliance that works internationally for disarmament. But until then, leaving NATO will not be possible unless we have a stronger defence force — that's just the reality of the situation we face. ■

## Christian Zeller (Austria/Germany)

**‘Neither Russia nor Germany expected the level of resistance demonstrated by Ukrainians’<sup>18</sup>**

*What can the energy ties between Germany and Russia tell us about the approach of Europe’s largest country towards Putin’s war in Ukraine. And how should ecosocialists approach the interrelated issues of climate, war, gas prices and international solidarity? Federico Fuentes discusses these issues with Christian Zeller, an editorial board member of the German-language journal, emancipation — Journal for Ecosocialist Strategy.*

Could you give us a sense of the importance of the energy ties between Germany and Russia. How have they developed over the years? And how have they been affected by the war?

The delivery of Russian natural gas to Germany is an old story. Ever since 1973, when West and East Germany started importing natural gas from Russia, the importance for Germany of Russian natural gas — as opposed to industrially-produced gas — has continuously risen to the point where it has become a critical source of heat for industrial processes in many industries, in particular the chemical and steel industry. With the collapse of East Germany, relations with Russia only intensified. For certain sectors of German industry, ensuring access to cheap natural gas from Russia was a strategic objective, as it was critical to market competitiveness. By 2020, Russian gas represented about 54-55% of natural gas used in Germany. Different companies, from West and East Germany, engaged in strategic collaborations with [Russian state-owned company] Gazprom over this time. One of these was Wintershall, a major multinational company that formed a joint venture with Gazprom, Severneftegazprom,

to organise the delivery of natural gas from Russia. Wintershall was a 100% subsidiary of chemical giant BASF before the merger with DEA in 2019. Now BASF still holds 67% of the shares of Wintershall Dea.

On the other side, Germany was important to Russia, as its largest gas importer. In the years leading up to Putin's war on Ukraine, Germany became the largest importer of Russian gas, surpassing Turkey, Italy, Belarus and France. So, these energy ties were important for both sides.

To this we can add the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, which was built with the goal of intensifying these relations and opened in 2011. Later, Russian and German companies promoted and built the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which would have allowed Germany to become a kind of gas hub for distributing Russian gas within Europe. Importantly, the Nord Stream pipelines bypassed Ukraine, where the traditional East-West pipeline for transporting gas was located. Russian officials promoted the Nord Stream pipelines explicitly to bypass and weaken Ukraine. This coincided with the interests of German corporations and political authorities who trusted in safe and reliable gas supplies from Russia.

But this decades-long orientation is over due to the war — at least for now. This means the German elite, German industry, and the major German capitalist groups will have to undergo a strategic reorientation in pursuit of other sources of natural gas mainly in the form of LNG (liquified natural gas), whether from the United States, Qatar or Azerbaijan. That's the challenge that they face right now. So far, they have been able to deal with this problem. Due to their enormous financial power German companies, backed by their government, have been able to buy LNG on the world market and outperform competitors with less purchasing power, especially in Asia. Of course, this relative success for capital is an issue that labour unions, environmental movements and socialist organisations should critically discuss.

### Does the rupture in relations, together with sanctions on Russia, explain why gas prices have been rising?

Many right-wing politicians and parties, such as the AfD [Alternative für Deutschland, Alternative for Germany], argue rising gas prices are due to sanctions. Empirically, that is not true: prices were already rising before the war. The war is a contributing factor, but it is only that. There are many different reasons that explain the rise in gas prices; it is a complicated story that cannot be explained in a monocausal way. But I would argue the fundamental reason for rising prices is the energy transition crisis that Germany, and all other countries, face.

On the one hand, fossil fuel companies have been very careful to invest, given

concerns over future prospects for their business due to the energy transition [away from fossil fuels] — though there are signs that due to increasing profit expectations, investment in fossil fuels is increasing again. On the other hand, renewable energies companies are not investing enough. Overall, there is a lack of investment from both sides. Moreover, states are not investing sufficiently either in energy transition. This overall lack of investment has provoked scarcity, at a time where demand has continued to rise. These are the fundamental reasons for rising prices.

There are many other reasons we can also add: the small economic boom that followed the pandemic; ecological reasons, for example, France having to shut down more than half of its nuclear power reactors during the past summer due to not having enough water to run them safely, which created a major energy crisis in France; and, of course, the fact that the price of electricity and gas are connected because gas is a major source of electricity. There are many different reasons that explain rising gas prices: the war is just one additional factor.

It is important, however, to add that it was Putin who shut down the delivery of gas to Europe, and not Germany or other Western European countries. The argument is that the West was responsible for cutting off the flow of Russian gas to Europe because of its sanctions, but it was Putin who cut off gas exports. There was a constant flow of German money going to Russia up until Putin stopped the flow of gas. And there are many companies from Germany and other European countries still continuing their business in Russia. The question, of course, is why did Putin take this step? He expected that he could influence the political debate in Germany and Western Europe. But it did not work as well as he hoped, because most people feel some solidarity with Ukraine.

**How has all this impacted on Germany's position towards Putin and the war? Is it the case that Germany has just followed the United States' position when it comes to the war in Ukraine?**

It is difficult to fully grasp this issue, and it is important to acknowledge that there are different, often contradictory, elements and developments at play. From a more strategic viewpoint, rather than pursue an aggressive policy towards Russia, the main German capitalist groups have traditionally promoted good relations with Russia. The left who say the German government has implemented an aggressive policy towards Russia are wrong. German business aims were to peacefully conquer the Russian market: that was the preferred method.

Even after [Putin's] annexation of Crimea, relations between the two remained steady. The two countries even cooperated in the military field: for instance, the multinational Rheinmetall provided arms and educational training facilities to Russia

right up until 2019. In terms of weapons sales, the ties between Germany and Russia were stronger than those between Germany and Ukraine. Another example: Russia built two new gas-fired power plants with Siemens turbines on the annexed Crimean peninsula. In doing so, Siemens violated European Union decisions on sanction. And Putin personally inaugurated the power plants in March 2019. The German capitalist class wanted these relations to continue. But the war has shown that Putin has his own project. What neither Putin — nor Germany or the United States — expected was the level of resistance we have seen from the Ukrainian people to this project. This has forced everybody to reconfigure their positions.

It is true that Germany is now dependent on other energy sources, such as LNG deliveries from the US, but also from other sources. But I don't see any proof that they have subordinated themselves to US interests; they continue to have their own interests and pursue them effectively.

### So, is Germany pursuing a different line to the US in this war?

We do not have access to the communications between governments, between corporations, and between both of them. But within the German ruling class, there are different sensibilities, it is not homogeneous. The most credible position is that they want this war to finish sooner rather than later, though not necessarily under any conditions. There were already public statements in June, when the situation was more difficult for Ukraine, from heads of multinational companies such as Volkswagen and BASF, arguing the case for an exit path out of the war, and stating Germany had to consider how it could re-establish new relations with Russia. That seems like the most credible position, because for them it makes sense.

But the ruling class in Germany has been forced to reorient itself. In autumn, the Ukrainian resistance made gains thanks, in part, to the weapons it received, but mostly because of the level of resistance exhibited by the people themselves. Now the situation has become difficult, as Russia is preparing a new offensive. Thus, the successes of Ukrainian resistance, the threat of new Russian offensives and Ukraine's need for heavy weapons and tanks make it difficult to argue for an agreement with Putin. If there was no genuine resistance to the invasion rooted in the population, such weapons would be useless, and nobody would be discussing the issue of delivering tanks to Ukraine. For example, the US used some of the most modern and sophisticated weapons in the world in Afghanistan, yet ultimately, they were still forced to leave.

Similarly, cheap energy from Russia is no longer available until further notice and the Russian market will not recover for a long time. The same applies to Russian capital, under much more difficult circumstances. Gazprom has lost its most important

sales markets in Europe for the time being as a result of the war.

I would not exclude the possibility that some factions of the German capitalist class see the war as an opportunity to substantially weaken the Russian regime. But the most important goal for the majority of them is to find ways to re-establish business with Russia. Perhaps this will now require a change in the regime, but I am sure that they are ready to re-establish business either with Putin or with someone else. They do not want to destroy Russia; from the German point of view that does not make sense. Whether it is Putin or someone else, they still need someone to play the role of a gendarme in this big and heterogeneous country.

### The link between war and climate change seems extremely evident. What should an ecosocialist response in this scenario look like?

An ecosocialist perspective needs to integrate three interrelated elements.

The first is social security for people and defence of real wages. But we must also include another aspect that is rarely mentioned, and which should be the focus, namely the expansion of social infrastructure. What is the best way to collectively protect people? By defending and improving social infrastructure: housing, health care, care in a broader sense, public transport, education. Generally speaking, we need cities of shorter distances. Such a perspective begins to incorporate the ecological dimension, because if we improve social infrastructure, we reduce the material and energy throughput in society.

The second element is the ecological question. We have to accept that the globe is warming and that the Earth system is changing — and fast. Yet the urgency of the ecological situation has not been fully understood by many on the left. It seems that global heating is something that is happening somewhere else in the world but not at home. They address the ecological question in a superficial way, as if it is just an add-on: if the add-on works, good; if it doesn't, or it is too complicated, they just drop it. But the ecological question has to be integrated into everything we do. This means, firstly, overcoming the energy transition crisis by speeding up the move to renewables, rather than pursuing Russia gas as advocated by industry groups and [Die Linke (The Left) parliamentarian and leader of the party's right-wing faction] Sahra Wagenknecht. Second, and just as important, this means a massive reduction in material throughput and energy consumption. This requires a complete industrial conversion, including the dismantling of certain industries.

The third element is international solidarity. In a general sense, this means taking into account that imperialist countries owe a huge ecological debt to the rest of the world. Carbon emission reductions in our countries must occur much more rapidly

than elsewhere. In a more concrete and immediate sense, the movement has to express its solidarity with Ukrainians resisting Russian occupation. It should be noted that the Putin regime and its military complex relies largely on revenues from the fossil fuel industry.

We need to integrate these three pillars. Unfortunately, the traditional left has just focused on one pillar — the social — and from a very minimalistic perspective. It is as if they think that because left forces are weak, we need to put forward simple demands — a kind of social populism — hoping this will mobilise people and help the left win influence against the right. I am not convinced such an approach will work. Many people see the urgency of dealing with rising energy prices, but they also see this is not an easy issue to solve. They understand that you cannot resolve it by simply imposing price caps, because all that means is the state subsidising companies by paying the difference. That is why we need a much more comprehensive approach that also seeks a reduction in energy consumption and radical ecological measures. ■



# Hisyar Özsoy (Turkey)

## 'Turkey has used Russia's war to further repress the Kurdish people'<sup>19</sup>

*From hosting negotiations between Russia and Ukraine through to threatening to block Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, few countries have played such an active role on the world stage throughout Russia's war on Ukraine as Turkey. Federico Fuentes talks with Halkların Demokratik Partisi (People's Democratic Party, HDP) Foreign Affairs Commission co-spokesperson Hisyar Özsoy about Turkey's growing international presence and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's war on Kurdish people in the region.*

**Why do you believe Erdogan has played such an active role in the current conflict in Ukraine? What impact has Putin's war had on Turkish politics? And could you outline the HDP's position on the war?**

First of all, we strongly oppose this war. What Russia has done is unacceptable. We want Russia to immediately stop this aggression and withdraw from Ukrainian territory. But we also see that this war is not simply a war between Russia and Ukraine; it is part of a broader and bigger war between Russia and the expansionism of NATO. It is a bigger power struggle, whose battlefield is Ukraine.

The Turkish government has made use of this opportunity to promote its own interests. Turkey has the second largest army within NATO and is the most important NATO power in the Black Sea region. That is why, with the war in Ukraine, Turkey's geopolitical significance has increased. Whether it is the deal to transport grains or Turkey's key position in NATO when it comes to vetoing the membership of other countries, all of this has provided Erdogan with specific opportunities.

Erdogan wants to use these not only to convince his international partners to let him rule the country for another five years, but also as an opportunity to repress Kurdish people even more. One of the main demands Turkey placed on Sweden and Finland joining NATO was that they help Turkey in its "fight against terrorism". But

according to the Turkish state, almost any Kurdish demand falls within the scope of terrorism.

### How do you view Turkey's role in the region? And what can you tell us about the recent attempts to seek a rapprochement with Syria?

Turkey has an expansionist agenda — many people call this neo-Ottomanism. Turkey claims to have to build its influence in the territories formerly known as the Ottoman Empire, such as Iraq and Syria. More recently, Turkey has pursued an aggressive policy in the eastern Mediterranean towards Greece.

Turkey has been a crucial part of the war in Syria. If the Syrian state and society is almost totally dysfunctional today, it is because Turkey made a huge contribution to this whole process by supporting all kinds of groups against the Syrian government and directly involving itself in the war through its occupation of parts of Syria, in particular Kurdish-populated areas. Erdogan recently said he was open to meeting with [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad. This was a kind of admission of the failure of his policy towards Syria. After 10 years of war, bloodshed and millions of Syrian refugees fleeing to Turkey, Erdogan now wants to negotiate with Assad.

This is the result of two things. The first is that [Turkish] people are very tired of the war in Syria and of the refugees in Turkey. Erdogan is trying to create the illusion that he may be able to resolve the issue by negotiating with Assad to find a way to send these refugees back. The issue of Syrian refugees is a very important one for the [May 2023] elections because Turkish people are mostly very racist towards these refugees and want to see them all shipped back to Syria. But everyone knows that without some rapprochement with Assad this is not going to be possible.

The second, and equally important, reason is that Erdogan wants to destroy the gains made by the Kurds in Syria. By attacking the Kurds with the help of Islamists groups and former elements of the Syrian army, Erdogan has been partly successful in pushing the Kurds back a bit, but partly unsuccessful because the Kurds are still the second dominant force in Syria. To further destroy Kurdish gains, it seems Erdogan has been advised to build better relations with Assad. Both of them have a very anti-Kurdish policy, so rather than fighting with Assad, Erdogan is entertaining the idea of working with Assad to attack the Kurds together. ■

# Israel Dutra (Brazil)

## ‘In the Ukraine war, Putin represents the global threat of the extreme right’<sup>20</sup>

*Israel Dutra, of the Movimento Esquerda Socialista (Socialist Left Movement, MES), speaks to Federico Fuentes about Putin’s war, solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance and Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s peace proposal. Dutra also discusses the twin challenges facing the international left today: inter-imperialist rivalry and combating the rise of the extreme right. MES is a tendency within the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (Socialism and Liberty Party, PSOL), of which Dutra is the secretary general.*

Could you begin by outlining the position of MES/PSOL on the Ukraine war and how your organisation characterises this conflict that has generated so much debate within the left?

Firstly, I would like to say that we greatly value and respect the work you have done to help make available information about the war through the interviews you have conducted with leftists in Ukraine, a number of which we have translated for publication in Brazil. We have often used the interviews you have done for *Green Left* and *LINKS* with comrades from Social Movement in Ukraine, as well as with leftists in Russia, Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, as reference points to better inform our discussions and help work out our position.

As soon as the war broke out, we immediately went into a state of emergency and adopted a clear statement based on a class struggle perspective. We looked at the fact that Russian imperialism — albeit a very minor imperialism compared to other imperialisms — had taken the reactionary step of occupying Ukraine with the aim of destroying its independent existence. Putin openly sought to justify the invasion by claiming [Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir] Lenin had been responsible for Ukraine’s appearance in the 20th century and that this had been a tragic mistake: this was the narrative he promoted to justify occupying Ukrainian territories and

incorporating them into the Russian Federation. It was evident that Putin's initial aim was to launch a blitzkrieg, quickly overthrow Zelensky and install a puppet government that would offer no resistance to Russian occupation. Putin's hope was that this puppet government could act as a buffer against NATO — a kind of imperialist protectorate.

Faced with this reality, we saw it as crucial to reject Russia's actions and express our solidarity with Ukraine, just as we had done with the war against the Kosovar people [in 1998-99]. Back then, we opposed NATO imperialism, which was bombing Serbia, but also denounced [Serbian leader Slobodan] Milosevic as a war criminal and staked out a left position in support of Kosova, even helping to organise solidarity convoys. We are not facing the exact same situation today, but our basic stance of solidarity with Ukraine follows in that vein.

Our position on this conflict is framed by three factors. The first is that this is an imperialist occupation of a people; of a sovereign, democratic nation with a liberal bourgeois regime, albeit a distorted one like any other, but a regime in which the government was elected by the people. It is not a dictatorship, much less a fascist one as some have tried to slander Zelensky's government: it is a bourgeois government that oppresses its own people, but it is not fascist.

The second factor is the threat of nuclear war. Not since the Cuban missile crisis have we faced such a threat. The world has already reached several critical tipping points when it comes to the climate and economic and social issues. Now, because of Putin's war, the potential for a nuclear war is once again on the table. This is something that should set off alarm bells for everyone, not just socialists, because it is not an abstract issue: Putin has threatened to use nuclear bombs. Given this, we must send a clear message, otherwise we risk opening up the possibility that nuclear bombs could be used in a subsequent conflict — and not just as a threat.

The third factor is that this war has strengthened the extreme right internationally. We see combating the extreme right as a central task for socialist today. Contrary to what others say, in particular those who hold a campist position, it is Putin who represents the threat of the extreme right in this conflict. Putin is no democrat, much less some kind of inheritor of the Soviet Union's legacy. As well as being a dictator, Putin is an extreme right ideologue. On Putin's side we have other extreme right ideologues of international significance, such as Alexander Dugin, and we have the Wagner group, a fascist gang of the worst type: a militia composed of mercenaries and fascists, akin to the Freikorps in World War I.

In light of the fact that we are dealing with a war of occupation; one that poses the threat of nuclear war; and one that involves a fight against the extreme right, we have taken the position of supporting the Ukrainian resistance as well as the pacifist and

democratic forces and oppressed nations within the Russian Federation who refuse to be used as cannon fodder in this war.

### What kind of practical actions has your organisation taken in light of its position?

In terms of practical solidarity, we have sought to intervene, together with comrades from other countries, in two ways. First, we have sought to work with the best elements of the Ukrainian left, such as Social Movement. This has included participating in a network of left publications that was established for this cause and that includes the Ukrainian left-wing journal *Commons: Journal of Social Criticism*. Through this network we have shared and translated information coming out from the Ukrainian left. We also sent two MES leaders, Bruno Magalhães and Roberto Robaina, to Poland to attend the congress of Razem and meet with other Polish comrades with a long trajectory of revolutionary left activism, such as Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski. Bruno then travelled to the Poland-Ukraine border to speak with Ukrainian refugees. As MES, we believe it is critical to not only support the resistance in Ukraine but also help support the seeds of socialist politics that are sprouting in Eastern Europe amid the scorched earth that was left behind by Stalinism, making it clear to them that a genuine left exists — one that is not with Putin.

At the same time, inside Brazil, we have made contacts with the local Ukrainian community, which has very contradictory politics and sees the left as pro-Putin, but despite this we have been working with them. So much so that we convinced many of them to not vote for [former president Jair] Bolsonaro in the past elections. We invited a Social Movement comrade to Brazil and managed to get him to speak in favour of socialism at the biggest annual traditional festival organised by the local Ukrainian community. We have also supported solidarity conveyed organised by trade unions and one of our comrades helped translate a book on Ukraine that was recently published in Brazil. So, we are not just talking about Ukraine but also carrying out practical solidarity; we are not remaining passive but getting active.

### Has the PSOL taken this same stance?

I would say that our position slightly differs from the one that PSOL has taken as a whole. PSOL has not adopted a particularly clear stance on the conflict; rather, it has sought to administer differences within the organisation over the conflict. Our tendency represents a little less than half of the party; it is the largest individual tendency within the party. But within PSOL today there is a coalition between two blocs of tendencies, PSOL Popular and PSOL Semente [PSOL Seed], which together hold a slim majority. This has led PSOL to take a somewhat intermediary position.

Generally speaking, given our political weight within the party, our position has tended to be the one expressed in party statements. But overall, the PSOL has not really said much about the war. The party as a whole has not taken a strong stance because among our MPs there are two positions: one that wants to actively intervene around this conflict, which is the position of MES; and one that prefers to not discuss the issue or make public statements on the war, even if publicly they do not criticise our position.

Brazil's president Lula da Silva has received a lot of attention for his proposal to set up a "peace group" of neutral countries and see if an end to the war can be negotiated. At the same time, Lula has been criticised for statements he made that blamed Russia and Ukraine equally for the war. Could you outline how you view Lula's position on the war?

In order to understand Lula's position on the war, we need to understand the current global situation and the role that Lula is seeking to play on the international political scene within this context. The imperialist system today finds itself in crisis. One only has to look around to see that the United States, which has traditionally viewed itself as the global police officer, has never been as weak as it is today on the global level. Moreover, large fissures have emerged within the US bourgeoisie, with establishment sectors that promote a kind of "progressive neoliberalism" that supports certain rights when it comes to women, the LGBTIQ community, etc, being challenged by an emergent neo-fascist or proto-fascist sector that has a strategy of occupying the state and undermining democratic institutions. Within this framework, Lula is attempting to convert Brazil into a kind of counter-hegemon.

It is important to remember that during Bolsonaro's four years in power, he transformed Brazil into a pariah state on the international scene. He was regularly left out in the cold at international gatherings, and seen as a buffoon, a clown. It is also important to remember that Bolsonaro's government was one of Putin's biggest supporters. Just two weeks before the war started, Bolsonaro was in Moscow with Putin and under Bolsonaro, Brazil never condemned the war in the United Nations.

Compared to Bolsonaro, Lula is seen as a breath of fresh air. Lula's return to power rightly raised expectations because he was always a very talented head of state who sought to promote multilateralism and South-South diplomacy and had an integral vision for a world of peace and democracy. This vision coincides with that of Itamaraty [Brazil's Minister of Foreign Relations], which has a long tradition of such a foreign policy, even if this tradition is not as deeply ingrained as it is, for example, in Mexico. When it comes to international human rights, Brazil has a history of taking progressive

stances, ever since the fall of the dictatorship, on issues such as recognising Palestine, opposing wars and supporting migration rights.

On the international scene, Lula is still seen as a major league player, but he does not have the same prestige he once had. Moreover, he has not yet come to terms with the new global situation. His outlook has remained frozen in time from when he was last in power and has not adjusted to the changes that have occurred since then, in particular with regards to growing inter-imperialist competition between the United States and China, as evidenced by the microchips and currency wars under way between these two powers.

This leads Lula to play a contradictory role on the international scene. On the one hand, Lula's declarations on Ukraine generate sympathy because he raises the issue of peace. But, on the other hand, his declarations have tended to be quite vague and confused. Moreover, to date, he has not been able to meet peoples' expectations; rather, he has contributed to generating more crisis and confusion, for example by hosting Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov in Brazil. While, previously, Bolsonaro directly propped up Putin — something that is unexplainable for the campists who see Putin as some kind of anti-imperialist — today, Lula indirectly aids Putin.

### So, what about Lula's plan?

When it comes to proposing a peace plan, even Putin has his own “peace plan”, which would see Russia continue to occupy Ukrainian territories. But that is not a serious peace plan; it is not even a basis on which to start negotiations.

In Brazil, everyone is still waiting to see what Lula's peace group and peace plan might look like, but so far he has not gone beyond words and, unfortunately, these words have generally not contributed towards finding a just peace.

### But Lula's basic idea of negotiations is a good one, right?

In a war, negotiations are not just positive but necessary. In modern warfare, conflict is necessarily fought along two fronts: in the trenches and theatre of operations, and in the diplomatic arena. This is not new. There was a big debate in the workers movement over the question of negotiations when the Bolsheviks took power in 1917 and shortly after signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk [a peace pact with the Central Powers in World War I that ended Russia's participation in the war]. This decision was hotly debated for months by the Bolsheviks, but in the end, there was no other option but to go to the negotiating table amid a war that had already dragged on for several years.

So, negotiations are inevitable and necessary in a war, particular when the war is stuck in a stalemate, like we have in Ukraine at the moment where, on one side, the

Russian army has suffered heavy losses and, on the other side, Ukrainians are having to deal with the impacts of the immense destruction that the war has reaped on them, particularly their electricity infrastructure, which has come under sustained Russian attack for the purpose of weaken peoples' resolve to continue fighting back. Today, in Ukraine, there is no clear end in sight to the war, at least in the short-term. There is hope that a new Ukrainian counteroffensive could shift the situation, but there are no guarantees this will occur. So, in a war of these characteristics, negotiations are not just necessary but inevitable. I think Zelensky is wagering on some kind of negotiation and Putin too, in his own way. So too Chinese president Xi Jinping, because the reality is that the outcome of this war will have an impact on imperialism's broader geopolitical crisis.

But we can also say that not all negotiations are either good or bad. We have to move beyond adjectives and look at objectives. For example, negotiations in which Putin agrees to leave Ukraine would be a positive step forward and represent a big democratic victory. But negotiations that lead to a peace of cemeteries, to a frozen conflict, would represent a defeat for Ukraine and not just a temporary victory for Putin but a blank cheque for a person who has publicly stated he is willing to use nuclear weapons, thereby opening up a very dangerous scenario. In this sense, while we understand the generalised, positive sentiment that exists in favour of peace and for an end to a war that has contributed to rising prices that have made workers' lives harder everywhere, we believe calling for negotiations without any content, raising negotiations as a generic slogan, does more harm than good.

In sum, we think it is a good thing that Lula is using his prestige and standing as a statesman, as a person with good standing among the Global South who is seen as a democrat, to seek a peace plan for Ukraine. But any plan that seeks to force Ukraine to capitulate is regressive.

**What about the question of arms? Lula has publicly refused to give Ukraine weapons and blamed the US for prolonging the war through arms deliveries to Ukraine.**

To start with, it is evident that this is a struggle between unequal sides and that, therefore, Ukraine has the right to ask for weapons in order to fight back against the invaders. This is not only a socialist position but a basic right in international law: a country that has been invaded has the right to resist in whatever way they see fit.

Of course, we cannot close our eyes to the role that NATO and US imperialism play in the world. And we should not be surprised that this issue [of NATO arms to Ukraine] has generated confusion. For almost a century, US imperialism has globally



played the main role of promoting wars, oppressing people and supporting dictatorships, including in Brazil. For this reason, it is in our DNA to be against US imperialism. This just sentiment, in part, explains Lula's position on arms to Ukraine. Unfortunately, the campists seek to use this genuine and just sentiment by placing an equal sign between NATO's previous interventions and its current role in Ukraine — which is clearly not the case — to mobilise support for Russian imperialism.

But it is important to note that Brazil does not really have a history or tradition of sending weapons or troops abroad. Brazil does not have a military capable of really helping Ukraine. In reality, Brazil's military interventions have generally been very modest and its largest intervention, which occurred during Lula's first government when troops were sent as supposed "peacekeepers" to Haiti, has been a complete disaster. We strongly opposed that intervention right from the start.

So, the question of supplying arms is not so relevant in Brazil given the size of the Brazilian military. The key issue for us is how Lula is using his prestige to push for negotiations in a manner that generates further confusion among people about Putin's aims, thereby indirectly aiding Putin.

### **Lula's proposal is clearly framed within his overall vision for Brazil's foreign policy. How can we best understand this foreign policy?**

This is an issue that requires further development and debate. But I think there are two problems that we need to separate out. When Lula sought in his first governments to promote a multipolar world, he did so amid a context of emergent political processes that were seeking to break away from the more savage versions of neoliberalism that had been imposed in Latin America. Positive initiatives, such as the Bank of the South, were launched at the time; so too ALBA [the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America], a project promoted not by Lula but by the first generation of what we can call Bolivarian governments — Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador — though they sought to involve more moderate sectors. Amid the chaos that had emerged in the post-Berlin Wall world, the push to actively promote multipolarity at that time was, in and of itself, positive.

But two important changes have occurred since then. The first is China's consolidation into an imperialist power. We are no longer just dealing with a question of geopolitical multipolarity but economics interests that place China in direct competition with the United States. We are no longer just talking about developing political alliances, as Chávez wanted. China today is no longer simply a conjunctural ally but an imperialist power with its own strategic interests and nefarious aims, such as promoting an aggressive policy of natural resource exploitation in Latin American

countries. Brazil today is experiencing a process of reprimarisation [reconversion to primary production] of our economy, with large landowners, in many cases backed by Chinese companies, shifting production towards export-orientated commodities. This has caused local food prices to rise steeply. So, this is the first important change: China has consolidated itself as a non-hegemonic imperialist power that engages in competition with US companies over markets in dependent countries. Given China's role in the world today, we are not dealing with the construction of a harmonious alliance but rather an imperialist and predatory relationship.

The second issue, which is more complex, is that today, alongside the issue of relations between imperialist, semi-periphery and periphery states, we also have the rise of an extreme right current that has taken power in various states and which governments that are not aligned with that current need to politically confront. The world situation cannot be solely understood through the general geopolitical framework of inter-imperialist conflict — we also have to take into consideration the fight against the emergence of a mass neo-fascist political current in global politics when building alliances. Joseph Stalin was a criminal monster, but he was right to form alliances with democratic Allied forces against Nazi fascism. I do not think we are moving towards a war of the same characteristics as World War II now, but we cannot lose sight of this extreme right factor and only see the world through the prism of inter-imperialist rivalry.

We face a very complex situation in which there are two dividing lines internationally: there is inter-imperialist conflict, which is getting more intense and in which there is no progressive imperialist side; and there is the fight for democracy, with all its limitation, against dictatorships and fascism, which the socialist left needs to give more thought to and take sides in. Given all this, Lula should be very cautious when it comes to his foreign policy of multipolarity. At the same time, he needs to be an ally in the global fight against the extreme right. This is necessary because there are governments in Latin America that need support, such as Gustavo Petro's government in Colombia, which is facing an internal challenge from this extreme right current. But he has not done this due to his government's capitalist interests. Moreover, in Peru, Lula's government supplied an illegitimate government that emerged from a US-backed parliamentary coup against a democratically-elected president with weapons to brutally repress protesters. We as MES and PSOL strongly denounced Lula for helping to prop up the rightist Dina Boluarte government in Peru. Thankfully, due to our protests, the government recently announced it would no longer sell these weapons to Peru, but this position of selling weapons to a regime repressing anti-coup protesters, along with other regressive positions he has taken on regional politics, is not what many

were expecting from Lula.

You refer to these two dividing lines. Perhaps nowhere else is the intersection of these two lines, and the complexity that this brings with it, more evident than within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) alliance, which Lula promotes as a positive actor for multipolarity...

Like everything else, BRICS is marked by both these contradictions. We have, for example, the Indian government, which is part of BRICS, but which is governed by an extreme right that ruthlessly attacks its opponents and local peasant movements. Next door, in Pakistan, we have a geopolitical dispute in which US imperialism accuses the government of Imran Khan, an authoritarian capitalist government but one that is not aligned with the US, of cosying up to China. So, we can see at play both inter-imperialist competition and the struggle between democracy and the extreme right.

The problem is that Lula maintains the same vision for BRICS that he had 10-15 years ago. But, since then, the extreme right has started to impose itself, leading to new realignments. Amid further chaos, we will continue to see further realignments. Within all this, the left cannot lose sight of either contradiction. If we only see the world as divided between democracy and fascism and ignore inter-imperialist conflicts, we will not be able to explain the Taiwan situation. Simultaneously, we cannot ignore the extreme right and refuse to acknowledge the low-intensity cultural and political war under way. The left speaks a lot about geopolitics but not enough about the battle against the extreme right, which has built a base among evangelicals, military sectors, etc. We as the left need to collectively debate how we can best confront this extreme right. ■

## **Sam Wainwright (Australia)**

### **‘Our rulers have seized the opportunity provided by Putin to promote military spending and war’ <sup>21</sup>**

*Sam Wainwright is a national co-convenor of the Socialist Alliance. The following is based on a speech Wainwright gave as part of the panel “Ukraine, imperialism and the left”, alongside Social Movement activist Denys Pilash, at Ecosocialism 2022 on October 25.*

We know that in the context of this brutal war activists in the Ukrainian socialist group Social Movement face very difficult circumstances. The destruction of human lives and material infrastructure happening around you every day is hard for us to imagine. We give our deepest sympathy to all of you who have lost comrades, friends and family as a result of the war. We understand that you have had to throw yourselves into the defence of Ukraine against a brutal and senseless invasion, while also resisting every attempt by the Ukrainian government to use the war as an excuse to attack working peoples’ rights and democratic space. These are circumstances that most of us here in Australia find hard to even imagine.

I wrote an article for *Green Left* the very day before the invasion in which I dismissed it as a propaganda beat-up by the United States. Unfortunately, I completely underestimated to what extent the Vladimir Putin leadership was prepared to use force to advance its interests and the interests of Russian capitalism. Needless to say, I wish I had not been proven wrong. In the Socialist Alliance (SA) we do not set ourselves the task of being the experts on the social and political situation in Ukraine or Russia. But the invasion has had profound consequences for world and domestic politics that we need to grapple with if we are to chart a way forward.

The most immediate consequence for us flows from the fact that Australia is

completely embedded in the “Anglo-Imperialist” axis that includes Britain and the US. Our rulers have seized on the golden propaganda opportunity provided by Putin to promote increased military expenditure and to prepare the public for possible military confrontation with China. This of course would be a disaster for working people in our region and the whole world, potentially much worse than the disaster we already face in Ukraine.

## How to understand the invasion of Ukraine?

What approach has SA taken in analysing the Russian invasion itself? Beyond opposing the invasion, we have sought to steer a path between what I would call two extremes, or two wrong positions:

- The first of these is to simply fall in behind the liberal narrative dominant in the media that the war is pitting virtuous Western democracy against autocracy and tyranny. While unequivocally condemning the Russian invasion, we cannot concede anything to Western militarism. As socialists in the heart of the Western imperialist beast, we have to remind people that our relative privilege — both material and democratic freedoms — come at the cost of the people of the Global South, on whom war is inflicted every day of the week.
- The second mistake is to reduce the conflict to a proxy war between the West and Russia; to dismiss Ukraine as just a pawn of the West, thereby treating the wishes of the Ukrainian people as secondary. There are very few on the left that actively support Russia, but there is a tendency among some to effectively frame a Russian victory as a lesser evil to a Russian defeat. According to this view, the desire to see Western imperialism — and the US in particular — get a well-deserved blood nose trumps everything. That’s a fool’s anti-imperialism. Neither the crimes of US imperialism, the US’s own objectives of blocking Russia and China economically and militarily, nor its meddling in Ukraine change my view that the invasion is a catastrophe both for the people directly impacted and the global anti-imperialist struggle.

Based on that understanding, in Socialist Alliance we have adopted a policy on the war that says we support two important things:

- The Ukrainian peoples’ right to resist the invasion, to expel Russian armed forces from Ukrainian territory and to access the arms needed to achieve this.
- A return to diplomacy to de-escalate the situation and resolve the current impasse. This is not a call for Ukraine to capitulate, but rather a demand that both Russia and the Western powers abandon their war aims and allow Ukraine to live in peace.

Now, some people say that it is a contradiction to both support the right of Ukrainians to resist the invasion and to support negotiations to end the war. I disagree, or put another way, I agree but argue that it is a necessary contradiction for the following reasons:

- If there is a possibility of Ukraine securing a just peace through negotiations, or at the very least a peace that is better than the current hell it is going through, and that Ukrainian society is prepared to accept in the circumstances — then we should support it. But that does not mean we should demand that Ukraine sue for peace.
- Unless one side or the other scores a decisive military victory the war will end, or at the very least pause, through negotiations. Ukraine will be in a stronger bargaining position for having so successfully resisted the invasion.
- Fundamentally it is not Ukraine that we want to make concessions to secure peace, but Russia and Western imperialism. What do I mean by that? Well, the Russian concession is fairly obvious: withdrawing from territory occupied since it launched the invasion. For the West, it would include re-starting negotiations about a new treaty or treaties regarding the stationing of nuclear and conventional missiles in Europe and lifting the sanctions.
- Of course, we understand that what we want is not necessarily how things will play out. This will also be determined by both the balance of forces on the battlefield and the fact that if the West does decide to cut a deal with Russia, its first instinct will be to pressure Ukraine to concede territory rather than concede to Russian security demands or modify its own aggressive military posture in any way.

To summarise, I think it is a mistake to trap ourselves into insisting, as some sort of moral principle, that Ukraine should sue for peace at any price, or to insist on military victory for Ukraine at any price.

## Preparing for war with China

Not only are we being told to prepare for war with China; we are being told to expect it. The determination with which our rulers and media are beating the war drums makes it clear. Even if China does not strike first, we are drifting to war anyway. It is the stuff of nightmares. The US is absolutely determined to stop the growth of China's influence and its further economic development, by force if necessary. With its vassal states Britain and Australia in tow, it has seized on the invasion of Ukraine to galvanise support for military escalation. However, this has been the intention for some now. An important turning point was Barack Obama's 2009 East Asia Strategy or "Pivot to Asia". This was continued by Donald Trump — complete with all his unhinged rhetoric — and now by Joe Biden.

The Australia, United Kingdom, United States (AUKUS) agreement must be seen in the wider context of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the proposal to extend NATO to the Indo-Pacific. Under AUKUS, Australia will be further militarised and turned into a US garrison. This means: more deployments of US aircraft, vessels and joint war games; four new military bases, two new bases for the militarisation of space and greater support for combined military operations in the region; and proposed increased cooperation in hypersonic weapons and cyber warfare, underwater systems, artificial intelligence and long-range strike capabilities.

US annual military spending is triple that of China and has been for many years. Furthermore, China is ringed by US bases, which the US intends to supplement with a network of precision-strike missiles. Every step China takes to break out of this military encirclement is presented in our media as more proof of its aggressive intent. The military posture of China is overwhelmingly defensive, designed to protect its own coastline and preserve its access to the world via the South China Sea. However, it is also possible that it may overreact and take measures that lead to full-scale war. In fact, that seems to be what the US is trying to provoke. We are absolutely opposed to any attempt by China to achieve unification with Taiwan by force. But the US policy of actively encouraging such a conflict is utterly reckless.

It is simply impossible to confront the existential threat posed by runaway global warming while also pouring billions into a new Cold War in the expectation that it will one day become a hot war. This will become a defining issue of Australian politics, and while it is early days, we need to go on the offensive and popularise the need to *Fight climate change, not war*. This is not just a slogan, but a decisive choice for humanity. It is one or the other — and right now the Australian government is choosing war over serious climate action. We need to find ways to really popularise this understanding.

Unfortunately, we start on the back foot. A propaganda campaign whipping up the “China threat” has had a real impact. According to a poll conducted by the Lowy Institute in 2018, 52% of Australians believed China would act responsibly in the world. In two years that had dropped to 23%, and by 2021 it was down to only 16%. It is truly frightening to see how easily public opinion can be manipulated in this way. However, the small but growing networks and activity in opposition to AUKUS and the war drive more generally is a good sign. We need to strengthen anti-AUKUS coalitions where they exist, and to start educating Australians about the war drive and where it comes from. In doing so we have to turn the language of the warmongers on its head. The Australian government is committed to war, not security. We are the ones with a security policy based on demilitarisation and uniting humanity in the fight to confront climate change.

## Shifts in world capitalist order: what is going on?

On the left there has been some debate about whether Russia is an imperialist power. Oftentimes this is more frustrating than useful because the people involved are using different definitions of the word.

So let us start with the definition developed by socialists in Vladimir Lenin's time, most notably in the 1916 pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. This identifies imperialism, among other things, as a world economic order in which value is extracted from the Global South by virtue of the fact that productivity of labour is so much higher in the wealthy countries because that is where capital and technology is concentrated. That understanding remains vital because it continues to describe fundamental features of the world in which we live. Here are three recent events that illustrate this in operation:

- EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's declaration that, "Europe is a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden."
- US measures to stop China from developing microchip technology, including export controls, and the restriction on US citizens and permanent residents from working with Chinese semiconductor producers.
- The 400,000 dead in Yemen that barely rates a mention in Western media while Western countries, including Australia, jostle to sell more arms to the Saudi dictatorship.

It should not be a surprise that many people in the Global South effectively support Russia as the lesser evil in the current war, or at least are indifferent to Ukraine's plight. Understandably, all they see is Western hypocrisy.

Let us look at Russia's place in the world economy. Despite a population of 147 million, it has a GDP smaller than South Korea (population 51 million) and not much bigger than Australia's (population 26 million). With labour productivity about a quarter of the West, minimal foreign direct investment by Russian capitalists and a dependence on the export of primary products, Russia is clearly not an imperialist power when measured against the criteria of Lenin's 1916 pamphlet. Even China, whose economy is very large in absolute terms, has a labour productivity four times that of India, but about 25% of that of the US or Western Europe.

Traditionally, we would have described such countries who are more industrialised than most of the Global South, but still way behind the West, as "semi-peripheral". However, this has usually assumed a subordinate relationship to a major Western imperialist centre, such as that between Mexico and the US. Given the political independence of Russia and China, and indeed their confrontation with Western capitalism, perhaps we need a different term. Certainly, Russian capitalism is much



weaker than its Western counterparts and lacks the means to project military power across the globe like the US does. However, Putin's Russia still embodies an aggressive capitalist project that believes the states of the former Soviet Union and other near neighbours are its rightful "sphere of influence" — and it is prepared to use war to enforce its project, just like Western imperialism is.

In an earlier phase, Lenin himself used the word "imperialist" to describe the Russian empire despite the much weaker development of capitalism in Russia at the time. So, while definitions are important, it is also important not to confuse semantics with substance. In this case, the Russian invasion is a catastrophe, no matter if you call Russia an imperialist power or not. And while opposing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we cannot drop our opposition to efforts by the US to reassert its control over world affairs. For the US there seem to be contradictory outcomes of the war emerging.

In Europe, the US has re-established its strategic hegemony and broken the growing economic links between Germany and Russia. The closure of the Nord Stream gas pipelines, forcing Europe to buy more expensive US fracked gas instead is just one proof of this. But elsewhere it seems to have accelerated the decline of US pre-eminence. Not only has the Eurasian capitalist bloc of Russia, Iran and China been drawn closer together; but the other big-hitters among both the semi-periphery and Global South have refused to fall into line behind the US sanctions regime, seeing opportunity in crisis. This has been the approach of Turkey, India, Qatar and even Saudi Arabia, which refused US requests to boost oil output to put downward pressure on prices.

Any erosion of the capacity of the US to play "world cop" is welcome. It potentially frees up room for the people of the world to push back against Western imperialism and choose their own paths. In Australia, our contribution to that process has to take the form of resisting the dangerous AUKUS war drive with everything we have got. However, an emerging "multipolarity" led by the governments of Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, India and Qatar is no guarantee of the development of a democratic anti-imperialist struggle, much less a stepping stone towards socialism. They viciously repress the workers and democratic movements in their own countries. Their "anti-imperialism" extends only as far as the interests of their own capitalist projects.

While disrupting the world order, these right-wing, nationalist and authoritarian capitalist governments that are sometimes in conflict with the West over "spheres of influence" are not and cannot be the spearhead of the anti-imperialist struggle. The dirty dealing between Putin, Turkey's Erdogan and Syria's Assad at the expense of the Kurdish freedom movement is proof of this. It is a reminder that we are on the side of working people the world over and it is they who will make the change we need. ■

## Phil Hearse (Britain)

### **‘There is a push for NATO to “go global” and confront not just Russia but China’ <sup>22</sup>**

*Federico Fuentes speaks to veteran British socialist and Anti-Capitalist Resistance member Phil Hearse about the sharp differences the war in Ukraine has provoked among the left and how these differences reflect deep underlying controversies about a world increasingly riven by inter-imperialist conflict.*

In the days after Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, you wrote it had “caused some disorientation on the Left”. Why do you think this was the case? How do you characterise this war?

I think disorientation on the left stems from the complexity of what is happening — the fact that Ukraine’s just defensive struggle for self-determination is overlain by, and intersects with, inter-imperialist conflict and the push for war against Russia and China by right-wing politicians and the military in the West.

This war is an absolute catastrophe, for Ukraine, Russia and the world economy. It is hard to overestimate the sheer viciousness and cruelty of what the Russian army has been doing, a continuation of what Putin did in Chechnya and Syria — massive air, artillery and missile attacks on housing, hospitals, shopping centres and schools, with huge costs to the civilian population. Thousands of civilians have been killed and maimed. More than one million people have been displaced. Ukraine admits to 10,000 soldiers dead, but maybe it is twice that. And Russia has lost even more.

In all that, there are many thousands of people who have suffered irreparable loss — the death of loved ones and the wrecking of families and homes. If socialism is not about standing up to this kind of barbarism, then I don’t know what it’s for. The cost of rebuilding Ukraine could be as high as €100 billion, and the call for Russia to pay reparations is absolutely justified — although I can’t see that happening without a change in the regime there.

One of the saddest TV broadcasts from Ukraine I saw was a middle-aged woman weeping over the death of family members and the wrecking of her apartment in a Russian missile strike. She said: “I’m a Russian speaker and all my family are Russian speakers. We regarded the Russians as our brothers. Now they do this to us. Why?”

Whatever the background to the conflict, the primary responsibility for the war obviously lies with Putin and the small, extreme right-wing nationalist coterie which surrounds him in the Kremlin. Putin and the nationalist ideologues like Alexander Dugin whom he listens to, say there is no such a country as Ukraine and want to re-integrate its territory with Russia.

The argument in the British left, echoed in all the English-speaking countries, has been mainly about NATO and sending weapons to Ukraine. In my opinion, if you say that the Ukrainian people have the right to self-defence, then they have the right to get arms from wherever they can. And the only realistic candidate is NATO — you cannot say that this is a war of national self-determination, but Ukraine has no right to effective weaponry that will enable them to resist. But opposition to arming Ukraine has been the position of the Communist Party, *New Left Review*, the Socialist Workers Party, and the leadership of the Stop the War Coalition. However, this is no longer a very urgent question. Ukraine has already got massive amounts of arms, mainly from the United States but also Poland, France, Britain, Slovakia and Germany. The demand to “arm Ukraine” is a bit superfluous.

I would say to comrades who are squeamish about getting weapons from the United States and other NATO countries that there are plenty of historical examples of revolutionary or progressive forces getting weapons from imperialist sources. For example, in 2014 the United States carried out multiple air attacks to aid the YPG [Peoples Defence Forces] under siege by the Islamist terror group ISIS in Kobani, a Kurdish town on the Syrian border with Turkey. This aid was decisive in defeating ISIS; without it, hundreds of Kurdish lives could have been lost and hundreds of women raped and brutalised. The United States continued to arm the YPG as the best fighters against ISIS in northern Syria, to the anger of Turkey and right-wing groups in the United States — until Donald Trump found out that the YPG was closely allied with the PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party] and that both had a Communist background. I for one strongly supported the YPG stance. Never say never in politics. And, of course, Britain armed [Josip Broz] Tito’s Communist-led resistance forces in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, for their own reasons, with the result that after the war the Communist came to power in that country.

In Britain, there is hardly anyone who accepts the position of John Bellamy Foster and the influential *Monthly Review* he edits — straightforward support for Russia.

Then again, there are those in the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign who don't want to raise the issue of NATO at all, a big mistake in my opinion. The right wing in European politics and the United States, and sections of the military and security apparatuses, are trying to push this war into becoming an all-out proxy war against Russia. The new head of the British army, Lieutenant General Patrick Sanders, told an international conference hosted by the army's think tank, that the British military must prepare for a land war against Russia! [US President] Joe Biden says openly that Russia must be substantially weakened through sanctions and military defeat.

**As you note the issue of NATO's involvement has perhaps been the most debated issue on the left. How do you view NATO's role in this conflict?**

Today there is a push for NATO to "go global" and become the framework for confronting China, not just Russia. Deepening militarisation, hugely increased defence budgets, pouring US Navy resources into the Pacific arena, and more and more American soldiers in Europe — this is the order of the day, and much of it coordinated through NATO. The US political theorist William I Robinson calls this a constituent part of "militarised accumulation", by which he means the way that defence, paramilitary and police expenditure, together with its complementary surveillance of populations — deeply integrated with high-tech firms like Apple and even Facebook — is becoming a much bigger part of capital accumulation and profit.

Militarised policing in the United States and elsewhere is a perfect illustration of how this system works. A new permanent arms economy has been put in place. In the 1980s, British theorist Mary Kaldor called the monstrous defence expenditure of the Reagan administration a "Baroque Arsenal". Now we have a super-Baroque arsenal, a grotesque level of military expenditure and weapons innovation that is superfluous to requirements even by NATO's profligate war-fighting standards. Take America's stealth fighters and ground attack aircraft. Why do they need both the F-22 and F-35 stealth fighter programs, each costing many billions? Considering any enemy they might be fighting against, there is no good reason. In fact, the US is now modernising and updating its existing F-16 fighters, which it has recently sold to Turkey. In every field — army, navy, airforce and marines — the United States and its allies have a super-abundance of weaponry which gives vast profits to the major arms companies like Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman and BAE Systems. Most of the top arms companies are American, but among the top 10 in profit terms are three Chinese companies. Militarisation is stretching into space as the United States and China in particular ramp up their space surveillance and weaponry programs.

Militarised accumulation is linked to the new ideology of imperialism. Until 1990

you had the old anti-Communist Cold War against the Soviet Union, but also against China, Vietnam and Cuba. Then, after 9/11, you had the War on Terror as the overarching concept which justified imperial outreach in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also the United States' continuing operations in Africa, where there are dozens of individual raids against Islamist fighters every day.

Now the War on Terror is over according to US defence analysts. While still undertaking anti-Islamist operations, the current priority is preparations for a direct war against Russia and a longer-term war against China. China is the main enemy for the simple reason that it is the only country capable of threatening US economic superiority. The main thing to realise here is that the wars being prepared for may never actually be fought, but that the United States tries to leverage its military dominance into leadership of the West and permanent pressure on the economies of its enemies. On the latter, by the way, I am against sanctions on Russia. This is part of the US sanctions regime, in which 39 countries have been targeted in 8000 individual sanctions against a wide range of people and companies.

The “End of History” theorist Francis Fukuyama has re-emerged to define the mainstream of this new period. Unsurprisingly it's “autocracy versus democracy”, which of course closely parallels the “dictatorship versus democracy” ideology of the first Cold War (1950-90). Like the first version, this new espousal of capitalist democracy has its contradictions and problems. For example, the world's most repressive state, Saudi Arabia, is put in the category of “democracy”, because it's “our” ally and a major oil producer. By contrast, Cuba is put in the category of “autocracy”, despite its amazing record of pro-working class social achievements, at home and abroad. The floods in Pakistan show once again that the main crises and conflicts of our time cannot be summed up as “democracy versus autocracy”, but by the need for radical action to solve the problems of the climate crisis, poverty, hunger, war and the growing chasm between the living standards of the global elite and the mass of humanity. The structure of the latter is brilliantly summed up by William I. Robinson and Yusef K. Baker in their article on “Savage Inequalities”.

The pro-NATO ideological mobilisation around Ukraine, absolutely massive in the United States and Europe, has its own obvious hypocrisy — Western powers, including especially Britain, have provided the planes, weapons and targeting expertise for Saudi Arabia's sickening war against the Huti rebels in Yemen, which has been every bit as brutal as Russia's war in Ukraine, probably more so. And yet there is almost nothing in the Western media about this. A 2021 UNICEF report puts the number dead in Yemen at 377,000 — probably 400,000 by now and a similar number wounded. Yet there is no mention of this and no outrage from Western “democrats”.

Against the pro-NATO ideology of “democracy versus autocracy”, socialists have to explain that the world is riven by inter-imperialist competition, between the United States, China and Russia. But with two important qualifications. First is that the military posture of China is overwhelmingly defensive, designed above all to fight a defensive war against the United States along its own coastline and the South China Sea. There are no Chinese aircraft carriers along the coast of California, and China is the one major nuclear power that has maintained the doctrine of “no first use” of nuclear weapons since the 1960s. Secondly, China is in fact an autocracy, a state-controlled capitalist regime, with heavy-handed and brutal repression, exemplified by the mass imprisonment and cultural genocide being carried out against the Uighurs in Xinjiang province. And, of course, by its brutal repression of the Hong Kong democracy movement. But I do not think that China would risk a military attack on Taiwan. Apart from drawing it into a military confrontation with the United States, China is heavily dependent on trade with Taiwan, in particular imports of Taiwanese-made computer chips, of which there is a big shortage world-wide.

The decision to go for “NATO enlargement” was taken at the Brussels summit in 1994. From 16 members then it has 28 members now. While these states have only 13% of the world’s population, they have 45% of its GDP — which tells you straight away that they represent the richer countries of the world. Former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his 1997 book, *The Grand Chessboard*, argued that Ukraine is the key to controlling Eurasia, militarily and politically. Eurasia here means the whole of the contiguous area from Portugal to Japan. Look at a map and you’ll see what he means immediately. I think this kind of dominance is still the United States’ objective. At its 1994 summit NATO agreed to “out of area” operations (Afghanistan for example). Wearing the NATO hat is not the key thing. In my opinion AUKUS, with the US, Britain and Australia, is effectively the Pacific version of NATO. America’s closest ally, Britain, joined it in the Iraq war, where the absence of a NATO badge was more a matter of form than substance.

In 1987, the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, put forward the idea of a “common European homeland”, in which neither Russia nor Europe, east or west, would be members of a military alliance, but instead combine to create peace and prosperity throughout the continent. After all, NATO’s military opponent, the Warsaw Pact, comprising Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland had dissolved. Communism in Russia had fallen, so what purpose did NATO now have? Of course, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has solved the conundrum of NATO’s purpose and drawn the Europeans tighter to US dominance. The United States presidents of that period, George Bush Snr and Bill Clinton, would never accept

the common European homeland idea, because NATO puts the US front and centre in European discussions about the economy and security. Instead, through NATO, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the West, with the US at its head, imposed a revanchist settlement on Russia. In the economy it was shock-therapy privatisation and in security it was to push NATO right up to the Russian borders.

These were the circumstances which led to the re-emergence of great Russian nationalism as a major political force. Putin was a key figure in the FSB, the re-christened KGB secret police. The military and security apparatuses rebelled against the billionaires who acceded to crashing the Russian economy and prostration before a triumphant NATO. The security apparatchiks who gathered round Putin did not neglect to fill their own pockets. But from then on, millionaires had to obey the *diktats* of the Kremlin. Dugin emerged as the leader of the National Bolshevik movement, which really had nothing to do with Bolshevism.

In the article I previously referred to, you said that while raising the slogan of “No to NATO Expansion” was correct, it should not be a central slogan of the anti-war movement and the left, and that its central slogans should instead be “against the Russian war, for a ceasefire and a withdrawal of all Russian troops”. Do you still feel this is the case? Should the focus not be instead on demanding negotiations as a way to end the war?

At this stage I think it is still correct to call for a ceasefire and Russian withdrawal. For the moment Russia is rejecting meaningful negotiations, and NATO countries are telling Ukraine not to negotiate until military victory. But a ceasefire is desperately needed to stop the present slaughter. I think a major defeat has already been inflicted on Russia. Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelensky has already offered to consider Ukrainian neutrality and other security guarantees as part of a settlement. Both sides have an urgent interest in a negotiated settlement, but the Russian leadership would have to accept that its goal of eliminating the Ukrainian nation is lost, and it can expect little more than some face-saving crumbs.

Some commentators have said that we should want the biggest military defeat of Russia possible, because that will serve as a warning to all imperialist countries not to invade other countries. This is pie in the sky, wishful thinking. A big military defeat for Russia will be experienced as a big victory for the United States and the West and will encourage it to go on to its next agenda point — China. In addition, banking on Putin seeing reason and never using battlefield nuclear weapons, whatever the defeat that Russia faces, is really dangerous thinking. A wider war with Russia threatens the world with nuclear catastrophe — another reason why we should campaign to bring this war

to an end. Personally, I doubt Russia's capacity to sustain an indefinite war, but the present regime, given the power of its domestic police apparatus, could sustain the war for several years despite its increasing unpopularity. Also, I think it is right to call for a normalisation of exports of Ukrainian wheat and Russian fertiliser and agricultural produce, which are desperately needed in African and other countries. All obstacles to both Russian and Ukrainian exports of these vital food products must be removed.

"No to NATO expansion" is a redundant slogan, because apart from Ukraine, there is nowhere else in Eastern Europe or Scandinavia for NATO to go, now that Sweden and Finland have decided to join. A more relevant demand is for NATO to be disbanded. The left also needs to step up its campaign against the militarisation that is taking place internationally. Europe in particular is the site of massive militarisation, with most governments stepping up their defence expenditure. The United States is the world's largest exporter of military equipment, but before the war Russia was the world's second largest exporter of weaponry, selling to reactionary regimes like that in Egypt, Pakistan, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and others.

War and the military are a disaster for the environment. The US military is the world's single largest institutional consumer of oil — and as a result, one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have had a serious impact on the natural environments of these countries. Military vehicles consume petroleum-based fuels at an extremely high rate, with the vehicles used in the war zones having produced many hundreds of thousands of tons of carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and sulphur dioxide in addition to carbon dioxide. ■



# Howie Hawkins (United States)

## ‘Support for the Ukrainian people’s war should not mean political support for US imperialism or Ukraine’s government’<sup>23</sup>

*Howie Hawkins is a retired Teamsters union warehouse worker, former US Green Party presidential candidate and ecosocialist. Together with a range of other leftists, socialists, unionists and academics, he helped set up the Ukraine Solidarity Network (USN). Hawkins speaks to Federico Fuentes about the initiative and the challenges of building solidarity with Ukraine while opposing US imperialism.*

Could you tell us a bit about how and why the Ukraine Solidarity Network came about, and what the fundamental aim of the network is? What practical solidarity does the network plan to carry out?

The Ukraine Solidarity Network was initiated at a meeting at the Socialism 2022 conference in Chicago in early September. We convened following a talk on “Ukraine, Self-Determination, and Imperialist War” by Yuliya Yurchenko of Social Movement, a democratic socialist organisation in Ukraine. Though initiated by socialists, we agreed to build a broader network of people to support the Ukrainian people’s national liberation struggle. Our fundamental aim is to build moral, political and material support in labour and social movements for the people of Ukraine in their resistance to Russia’s invasion and their struggle for independence, democracy and social justice. We want to nurture links between progressive labour and social organisations in Ukraine and the United States.

Public education is an immediate priority. We want to counter the narratives of significant parts of the old left and the peace movement in the United States who have decided that if the US is sending arms to Ukraine, they must automatically oppose that support. Given the vicious history of US imperialism, that stance may be

understandable. But a one-size-fits-all conclusion is not justified without a critical examination of each conflict. Would these people have opposed US military aid to the anti-fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War because it came from the US imperialist state? Or the military aid the US gave to the Soviet Union in World War II? Or the US arms and special forces the US sent to the Viet Minh resisting the Japanese invasion during that war? In the case of Ukraine, the knee-jerk conclusion of no US aid to the Ukrainian national liberation struggle reveals a US-centric colonial mindset. It sees US imperialism as the cause of what they call “the US proxy war on Russia”. It renders the Ukrainians invisible. Ukrainian perspectives on the causes of the war and why they want arms for self-defence are ignored, including the views of progressive trade union, socialist, anarchist, feminist, LGBTIQ+ and environmental movements in Ukraine.

The USN wants to be a voice on the US left that opposes all imperialisms — Russian as well as US — and supports the right of historically colonised and oppressed nations like Ukraine to self-determination and to self-defence against aggression. We are concerned that those on the US left who oppose aid to Ukraine and, in some quarters, openly support a Russian victory, are alienating progressive- and peace-minded people in the US and internationally from the left.

While US military and economic support for Ukraine currently has wide support in the political centre and left, it is fast eroding in the Republican Party. The US right admires Putin’s authoritarian strongman rule and his conservative Christian, ethnonationalist, patriarchal, anti-gay, anti-trans and climate change-denying policies and pronouncements. Far-right “peace” candidates, who will campaign on cutting aid to Ukraine and redirecting those military resources to Pacific deployments against China and Mexican border deployments against migrants, are likely to gain traction in the Republican presidential primaries. I hope the USN will have a significant influence on the Ukraine debate in US politics with a progressive perspective that support’s Ukraine’s self-determination and opposes both Russian and US imperialism.

One of the biggest challenges facing those in the Western left who stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people has been navigating through a situation in which our own ruling class is also ostensibly backing Ukraine. How do you view the war and the role of the US in it? How do you respond to the idea that a Russian defeat in this war will strengthen US imperialism? Is it possible to support Ukraine and oppose US/NATO's aims?

The left is for the liberation of the working class and oppressed people. We should start with supporting the Ukrainian people’s rights to self-determination and self-defence against Russia’s aggression. We should reject using the imperialist framework

of big power geopolitical competition to choose sides between rival camps of capitalist states. The anti-imperialist position is to support the national liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people against Russian imperialism.

Inter-imperialist antagonisms between capitalist states inevitably inject themselves into any national liberation struggle in this world of global capitalism. But that does not mean the left should subordinate Ukrainians' democratic demand for national liberation to the interests of one or another imperialist camp. It means we should support Ukraine's national liberation against both Russia's primarily military imperialism and the West's primarily economic imperialism.

Imperialism is a global system of rival imperialist states, not a system in which the US is the only imperialist power. Campists who support Russia's victory over Ukraine as the supposed proxy for US imperialism say it will weaken US imperialism. They say Ukraine's self-determination must be subordinated to the goal of a Russian defeat of US imperialism in Ukraine. They view as anti-imperialist any state in conflict with the US, no matter how authoritarian, capitalist or imperialist it is. They call for a multipolar world in which US imperialism is diminished, which supposedly opens space for socialist development.

This emerging multipolar world is really a return to a multipolar imperialist world with inter-imperialist rivalries that breed wars. Supporting an authoritarian capitalist and imperialist state like Russia, supposedly because it is an anti-imperialist check on US imperialism, will not open the path to socialism. US imperialism will not be defeated by other imperialist powers. The people of the US will have to reject US imperialism. It will take an international socialist left to replace capitalist states and the global imperialist system with a socialist multipolarity of cooperation and equality among nations.

Anti-US states like Russia, China, Iran, and their client states from Belarus to Syria, may have less power than the US/NATO alliance in the hierarchy of nation states. But the anti-US big powers also cooperate with US/NATO in the global imperialist system that exploits and dominates the world's weaker nations. Global imperialism is a multilateral, multipolar system of both competition and cooperation between capitalist states. The bigger anti-US imperialist powers, such as Russia and China, share management of global capitalism with Western imperialist nations through multilateral institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation, where they jointly promote neoliberal austerity, deregulation and privatisation, and in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, where they stood together in favour of no binding greenhouse gas reductions, no reparations for climate-related damages, and privatising Earth's atmosphere through carbon markets

and offsets.

Our support for military, economic and humanitarian aid for the Ukrainian people's war of military and civil resistance should not mean political support for US imperialism or the Volodymyr Zelensky government. We should give our political support to the progressive movements of socialists, anarchists, feminists, LGBTIQ+ people, environmentalists and trade unionists in Ukraine who are fighting both Russian and Western imperialism, as well as the neoliberal and authoritarian policies of the Zelensky government. As long as Ukraine is fighting for its national liberation, the class struggle for economic justice and the social struggles against the oppression of ethnic minorities, women and LGBTIQ+ people, and against environmental degradation will inevitably take a back seat to the multi-class struggle for national liberation. National liberation is a prerequisite for sharpening class and social struggles from below by the exploited and oppressed in Ukraine.

Ukraine's national liberation will not necessarily strengthen US imperialism. It depends on what the Ukrainians and those of us in solidarity with them make of it. The Ukrainians who have organised their people's war of mass participation in both military and civil resistance to Russia's invasion are developing the experience and sense of empowerment that can be employed to resist Western economic imperialism as well as domestic reaction. A defeat for Russian imperialism will be a defeat for the interconnected structure of world imperialism and a deterrent on other would-be aggressors. A victory for Ukraine will open possibilities for progressive class and social struggles against the same global capitalist system that we also fight at home. Progressive movements in Ukraine are clear that their prospects are far better under Ukraine's flawed but relatively open democracy than under the brutally repressive rule of Russia. International solidarity with Ukraine's national liberation helps us all advance towards a world of socialist democracy.

This challenge of supporting Ukraine while opposing NATO imperialism is perhaps presented most sharply with the issue of arms supplies to Ukraine. How do you view this question? How can one at the same time be anti-war while supporting sending weapons to a warzone? Isn't it the arms industry that most benefits from this war the longer it drags on?

If you say you support Ukraine's right to self-determination but oppose sending them the arms they need to defend themselves, you do not really support Ukraine's self-determination. You support disarming Ukraine and Russia's recolonisation of Ukraine. We should be against wars of aggression, but not against armed self-defence against such aggression. We must distinguish between the violence of the oppressor and the

fight back of the oppressed. The arms industry benefits from any war. But it would be moral bankruptcy to say Ukraine does not deserve self-determination because arms manufacturers are making profits.

In the US, we should support US military aid to Ukraine at the same time as we campaign against US militarism and imperialism. There are plenty of peace policies for which the US left and the peace movement should be campaigning, perhaps starting with nationalising the arms companies under democratic control to take the profits out of war and to eliminate the arms industry's election campaign donations and lobbying for ever-growing military budgets. To shrink the market for arms industry profits, we should demand deep cuts in military spending, a radical reduction in arms sales abroad, and a phase out of the more than 800 foreign US military bases. We should demand an end to US support for authoritarian regimes, like the dictatorship in Haiti, and for the wars and occupations of sub-imperial allies, including the Saudis and Emiratis in Yemen, the Moroccans in Western Sahara, and the Israelis in the Palestinian territories.

Russia's extortionist nuclear sabre-rattling in its war on Ukraine should push nuclear disarmament to the top of the US and world agenda. We should be demanding that the US stop its destabilising modernisation of nuclear weapons, pledge No First Use, and seek direct talks with Russia to re-establish and renew the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM), Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF), Open Skies, and Strategic Arms Reduction (START) treaties. We should call on the US to initiate aggressive diplomacy toward mutual disarmament among all the nuclear states to bring them all into compliance with the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

We should also support the demand of the Ukrainian left for the cancellation of the unjust foreign debts owed by Ukraine to the IMF and Western banks and expand that campaign into generalised demands for international debt justice and reparations for the damages to the Global South of colonialism, neocolonialism, and climate change.

With so much to do for peace and disarmament, it is disappointing that the most vigorous campaigning by a significant section of the US peace movement is to cut off US arms for Ukraine, which would not stop Russia's war of aggression.

The USN statement reads: "It is urgent to end this war as soon as possible. This can only be achieved through the success of Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion. Ukraine is fighting a legitimate war of self-defence, indeed a war for its survival as a nation. Calling for 'peace' in the abstract is meaningless in these circumstances." Does this mean the network sees a military victory

as the only possible outcome favourable to Ukrainians? Shouldn't the left campaign for negotiations as a means to bring the war to an end as soon as possible?

The USN supports the Ukrainian resistance and believes it is up to Ukrainians to define what victory ultimately means to them. We are not opposed to diplomacy and negotiations. We are opposed to the US negotiating a settlement with Russia over the heads of the Ukrainians.

The call for negotiations we are hearing in the US from the campists and some pacifists is really a call for the US to use the leverage of its military and economic aid to force Ukraine to accept an unjust peace based on Ukrainian land concessions to Russia. The most prominent proponent of that position in the US peace movement, Medea Benjamin of Code Pink, says that Ukraine will never win back all its land in the Russian-occupied territories and therefore a land-for-peace deal is the only way to stop the war. This call for a land-for-peace settlement is a call to carve up Ukraine between the US-led and Russian imperialist camps.

The Ukrainians aren't having it. The monthly polls by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on whether Ukraine should accept a peace settlement that concedes land to Russia shows consistently overwhelming opposition. Its December poll shows 85% of Ukrainians oppose, and only 8% support, conceding territory to Russia in exchange for peace.

Ukraine's current 10-point peace plan calls for Russian withdrawal from all occupied territories. Russia says it is ready to negotiate, but that Russian-occupied territories are non-negotiable. So, both sides continue fighting for more land to strengthen their positions at some future negotiations.

Speaking for myself and not the USN, because we have not discussed it, I think the US and NATO should pursue negotiations with Russia about pan-European security arrangements that could provide a background foundation for a just and enduring peace in Ukraine. The US was attempting to negotiate such mutual security concerns in response to Russia's ultimatum in December 2021 that NATO quickly agree to withdraw to the 1997 military deployments it had before it expanded east, or else — the "or else" being what the 150,000 or so Russian troops amassed on Ukraine's borders might do. The US should be offering publicly and aggressively to resume talks with Russia on a mutual security framework. If the US, NATO and Russia could agree on mutual security arrangements, which would surely include the renewal of conventional and nuclear arms treaties I mentioned before, it could give Putin a politically acceptable way for Russia to withdraw from Ukraine, claiming that his security objectives have been achieved. ■

# Appendices





# Appendix 1

## Questions about Ukraine<sup>24</sup>

*By Daria Saburova*

*To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So, one army lines up in one place and says, “We are for socialism”, and another, somewhere else and says, “We are for imperialism”, and that will be a social revolution! [...] Whoever expects a “pure” social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.*

*—Lenin, “The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up”, 1916*

On September 30, 2022, Putin endorsed Russia’s annexation of the regions of Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, following the bogus referenda held between September 23 and 27, repeating the scenario already tried out in 2014 in Crimea and the Donbas. This *coup de force* comes in the context of a major counteroffensive by the Ukrainian army in the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions and aims to justify the “partial mobilisation” of Russian reservists announced on September 21.

While this new episode of “popular self-determination” should shed some light on what happened in 2014, some voices on the left are still accusing Ukraine of having provoked the current military escalation. This article looks back at the events of 2014-2022 to answer several questions that continue to tug at the heartstrings of the radical left and hinder its solidarity with the Ukrainian popular resistance. These questions concern the separatist movement and the war in Donbas, the Minsk agreements, the politics of the post-Maidan government, the advance of the far right and the prospects

for the left in Ukraine.

## 1. From the annexation of Crimea to the war in Donbas

### Civil war or war of aggression?

On February 27, 2014, a few days after the fall of Viktor Yanukovych following the Maidan (or Euromaidan) revolution, a group of armed persons took control of the Parliament and cabinet offices of ministers in Crimea. The next day, the “little green men”, soldiers dressed in unmarked military uniforms, took over the airports of Sebastopol and Simferopol, as well as other strategic locations on the peninsula. More than two-thirds of the Ukrainian troops stationed in Crimea and 99% of the security personnel switched to the Russian side (Stepaniuk, 2022: 90). Barely three weeks later, following a hastily organised referendum, Putin signed the act of incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation (d’Anieri, 2019: 1).

In April of the same year, in eastern Ukraine, separatist forces took control of administrative buildings in Donetsk, Lugansk and Kharkiv, and called for referenda on independence for these regions. Although the Ukrainian authorities quickly regained control of Kharkiv, they were unable to recover the separatist regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, and the counter-revolution was at risk of spreading to other cities in the south-east.

The Ukrainian government responded to the creation of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics (which declared their independence in May) by launching an “Anti-Terrorist Operation” with fighting that lasted until February 2015, when the Minsk II agreement was signed. Although this agreement contributed to a significant reduction in the intensity of the fighting, it suffered, as we know, the same failure as the first agreement of September 2014. Before the February 2022 invasion, the war had already claimed more than 13,000 lives and created nearly two million refugees (Melnyk, 2022).

The questions most often asked in connection with these events concern the nature of the conflict in Donbas and the inevitability of its expansion: was it a civil war, a war of Russian aggression against Ukraine or a war that could be characterised as inter-imperialist from the start? Could the continuation of the war in the Donbas and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine have been avoided if the Minsk agreements had been effectively implemented?

If we look for a purely descriptive answer to the first question, there is no doubt that the war in Donbas can be characterised as a civil war, as a part of the local population actually participates first in the anti-Maidan demonstrations and then in

the pro-Russian separatist movement. The fact that the warring parties might receive external assistance does not change the validity of this description: civil wars generally involve external intervention in one form or another. However, on the political plane this issue quickly goes beyond the simply descriptive or theoretical aspect and becomes partisan, because it is a question of respective responsibilities that in turn determine political stances towards the Donbas conflict (Marples, 2022: 2; Goujon, 2021: 79).

Thus, Putin has always denied Russia's military involvement in the Donbas. The term "civil war" to describe what is happening there is part of the ideological arsenal of Russian propaganda. On the other hand, on the part of the Ukraine and the European institutions, the term "civil war" is banned even as they recognise the participation of the local population in the separatist movement. The war in Donbas has been described since 2014 (and officially since 2018) as a "Russian war of aggression", to emphasise not only Russia's military involvement in a civil war that was already under way, but also, and above all, its decisive role in triggering it (Cherviatsova, 2022: 29). It is not denied that the local population joined the separatists, but they are seen as mere puppets of the Kremlin.

### The separatist movement: what is Russia's involvement?

It has to be recognised that both these aspects of the conflict are present, and the question should rather be about the relationship between them. It is certain that the separatist movement would not have succeeded in gaining a foothold without a minimum of support from the local population, or rather without lack of support for the post-Maidan regime and for the Donbas liberation operation launched by the Ukrainian government in the spring of 2014.

There are no viable opinion polls regarding the territories under separatist control. But it should be remembered that in these territories, the Party of Regions and its leader Viktor Yanukovych, himself a native of Donetsk, won more than 80% of the vote in the second round of the 2010 presidential elections. A large part of the predominantly Russian-speaking population conceives of itself as "ethnic Russian", shares nostalgic feelings for the USSR — both in its positive socioeconomic aspects and in its socially and politically conservative aspects — and that the entire region is economically dependent on links with Russia (Marples, 2022: 3-4).

The events of 2014 can thus be understood as the culmination of a process over the previous decade in which the different fractions of Ukrainian capital invested in and exploited real divisions in identity and economy. By accentuating these divides each fraction could profile itself in the electoral game, relegating to the background the socioeconomic and political concerns common to the working classes in all regions of

Ukraine.

This was not always the case. The ethnocultural and linguistic theme of the “two Ukraines” only became central in politics after the 2004 elections between Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yushchenko. At the same time, the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) was marginalised as an independent player in political life and entered into coalition with the Party of Regions. From 2004 onwards, Ukrainian political life would thus be permanently structured according to the division between, on the one hand, the national-democratic, liberal and pro-European camp claiming a west Ukrainian identity and, on the other, the paternalist, Russian-speaking, pro-Russian camp, claiming a south-east Ukrainian identity.

This divide also takes the form of a struggle over historical memory: some claim to be part of a national liberation movement with Stefan Bandera as a national hero, while the others emphasise the “Great Patriotic War” against fascism. Each side develops a diabolical image of the other: western Ukrainians are stigmatised as the heirs of Nazi collaborators, eastern Ukrainians as nostalgic for the Stalinism responsible for the death of several million Ukrainians during the famine of the 1930s. This domestic dynamic is accompanied on the geopolitical level by a rise in tensions between Russia and the West, which end up crystallising in a special way around the Ukrainian question (Gorbach, 2022).

According to polls, the majority (55.2%) of the population of Donbas was against signing the free trade agreement with the European Union, with preference (64.5%) for the customs union with the Russian Federation. According to a poll conducted in December 2013, only 13% of respondents said they supported Euromaidan, while 81% said they did not (Risch, 2022: 10-11). The majority attitude of Donbas residents towards Maidan ranged from indifference to hostility, reinforced by the class contempt that pro-Maidan forces were experiencing towards themselves.

Yet Maidan had the potential to unite not only bourgeois democratic forces, but also the working classes of the whole country around common demands. Although they were less massive, there were also pro-Maidan demonstrations in the Donbas, protests against corruption, the abuses of the police state and the dysfunctional legal system, and in favour of the values associated — rightly or wrongly — with Europe, such as democracy, respect for the law, civil and human rights, as well as higher wages and living standards.

However, this potential was suffocated, on the one hand by the entry into the movement of far-right groups that imposed a nationalist agenda on the Kyiv Euromaidan, and on the other hand by the effort of local authorities in the east to discredit the movement (Risch, 2022; Diagtiar, 2014). As happened in Kyiv, local

representatives of the ruling party responded by forming militias to intimidate, discredit and disperse the protests. And as in Kyiv, they organised and financed anti-Maidan/pro-government demonstrations. Finally, the radicalisation of the demonstrations in Kyiv that led to the overthrow of the regime, as well as to the interim government's repeal of the law on regional languages adopted two years earlier, reinforced the media's belief that Ukrainian nationalists would bring disorder to the Donbas, oppress the Russian-speaking population and, through the country's radical pro-European reorientation, threaten the region's socioeconomic balance.

However, none of this means that from the outset there was a broad popular mobilisation for independence of these regions or for their attachment to Russia, nor that the reaction against Maidan meant inevitable descent into civil war. Separatist and pan-Russian organisations (Donetsk Republic, Novorossiia Fan Club, Russian Bloc, etc.) were very marginal before 2014. Until February 2014, their demonstrations condemning the fascist coup, calling for the defence of the Russian Orthodox Church and incorporation of Donbas into Russia gathered only a few dozen people (Risch, 2022: 17). The expansion of the separatist theme was rather the work of local elites and Russian-backed minority separatist forces who were able to exploit widespread popular discontent with the new government.

Interviews with people from the separatist regions reveal, above all, a sense of powerlessness, a feeling of being held hostage to geopolitical games beyond their control, resentment towards all warring parties and a deep desire for a return to peace (Gritsiuk, 2020). This low level of popular mobilisation is in stark contrast to the current resistance of Ukrainians to the Russian invasion, with 98% of respondents to the latest polls giving strong support to the Ukrainian army.<sup>25</sup>

It can therefore be said that without Russia's involvement, the mistrust of the Donbas populations regarding the Maidan revolution would certainly not have turned into a civil war. First, there is the immense role that Russian propaganda played in discrediting Maidan as a US-orchestrated fascist coup. The Russian media or media controlled by local pro-Russian elites — the main sources of information for the local population — spread all sorts of false information and rumours about the fate the new Kyiv government was reserving for the Russian-speaking population: that Russian speakers were going to be fired from positions in state institutions and enterprises or even expelled from the country; that the “Banderites” were going to come to the Donbas to spread fear and violence; that the mines in the Donbas were going to be permanently closed and used by European countries to store their radioactive waste; that the Ukrainian market was going to be flooded with genetically modified food products; that the United States was going to use Ukraine as a base for waging war

against Russia. In the political crisis of winter-spring 2013-14, Russia was thus increasingly seen as a guarantor of peace and stability (Risch, 2022: 22-23).

Then there was the direct involvement in the anti-Maidan protests and the separatist uprising under the banner of the “Russian Spring” of Kremlin advisers like Vladislav Surkov and Sergey Glazyrev, as well as of Russian special forces. This operation was initially led by the Russian citizen Igor Girkin (Strelkov), later to be replaced by Donetsk national Aleksandr Zakharchenko in order to give more legitimacy to the leadership of the new republics (Marples, 2022: 3).

Finally, from June 2014 onwards, Russia got involved in the war not only by sending heavy weapons to the local separatists but directly with the participation of Russian army units in the fighting in Ilovaisk in August 2014, in Debaltsevo in February 2015, etc. (Goujon, 2021: 80). This military intervention came at a time when the Ukrainian army and volunteer battalions were about to inflict a decisive defeat on the separatist forces. It was the entry of the Russian army into the war that turned the tables, prompting Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to start the negotiation process and sign the ceasefire known as the Minsk agreements.

### The Minsk agreements: an avoidable war?

It should be remembered that the Minsk agreements came at a time when the Ukrainian government was in a very unfavourable military situation, when Russia was reversing the situation on the battlefield and threatening to continue territorial conquests in the east and south of Ukraine, with at stake the creation of a land corridor from Crimea to Transnistria. At that time, there was already a real fear of a large-scale invasion of the country. Ukraine was therefore forced to accept the terms of the negotiations. For Russia, it was a question of finding a way to maintain a decisive influence over Ukraine’s internal and external politics, because with the loss of Crimea and part of the Donbas, the most pro-Russian vote had already left Ukraine.

To secure control over its former semi-colony, Russia was therefore more interested in the reintegration by Ukraine of the separatist territories on condition of the country’s federalisation — no strategic decision could then be taken without the agreement of all the members of the federation — than in recognising their independence or in attaching them definitively to Russia, which is what the separatist leaders themselves wanted.

Negotiations took place twice: in September 2014 (Minsk I), then in February 2015 (Minsk II). The Minsk agreements included several points with a security component (ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, exchange of prisoners, restoration of the Ukrainian border) and a political component (amnesty for those involved in the separatist movement, constitutional reform of Ukraine establishing a principle of

decentralisation of power, recognition of a special status for the Lugansk and Donetsk regions, organisation of local elections).

None of these agreements were fully implemented. Their failure is explained by the deadlock in the negotiations on the political side. Ukraine demanded that local elections be organised according to Ukrainian law and under the supervision of independent international institutions after the dismantling and withdrawal of all illegal military formations (separatist forces, mercenaries and the regular Russian army) and the resumption of Ukrainian control over its border. Putin wanted the process to start with local elections and constitutional reform. The other point of disagreement concerned amnesty for the leaders of the separatist republics and the recognition of a special status for the Donbas.

This status implied that the regions should be able to conduct autonomous economic, social, linguistic and cultural policy, appoint prosecutors and have independent judicial bodies, as well as form their own “people’s militia”. The text also suggested that the central government should contribute to strengthening cooperation between the Lugansk and Donetsk regions and Russia. In concrete terms, the text of the agreements aimed to legalise the status quo: the current separatist leaders would become the official representatives of Ukrainian power in the occupied territories, their military formations would be maintained, and they would officially take control of the Russian-Ukrainian border.

In this form, Ukrainian society could not countenance the Minsk agreements. At most, they provided a temporary freeze to the conflict. It was clear that for Russia the agreements were about acquiring a permanent instrument for interfering in Ukrainian affairs in order to prevent the country from pursuing an independent foreign and domestic policy, and to be able to prevent new popular uprisings against the local representatives of its neo-colonial domination. Moreover, these agreements did not provide any solution to the Crimean question (Cherviatsova, 2022). The implementation of these agreements by the Ukrainian government would have surely led to a new political crisis, a new Maidan led this time by the most reactionary political forces. From the point of view of *realpolitik*, one could always say that the Ukrainian government could have avoided the war by making concessions to Russia. But such a statement amounts to blaming the victim and accepting that imperialist powers can dictate to peoples the conditions of their submission under military pressure.

## 2. Political and social life in Ukraine between 2014 and 2022

### Electoral shifts and neoliberal reforms

In this context of war and impasse in negotiations, the mandate of Poroshenko was marked by a rampant rightward shift in domestic politics and the strengthening of the militaristic message responding to the demands of the most nationalist fringe of post-Maidan civil society. Poroshenko displayed willingness to wage war until Crimea was recovered, continue increasing military budgets and promote Ukraine's membership of NATO. In April 2019, however, Volodymyr Zelensky won the second round of the presidential elections with more than 73% of the vote, and his party Servant of the People, named after the TV series to which Zelensky owes his popularity, obtained an absolute majority in parliament with 43% of the vote.

Zelensky's election campaign was classically based on anti-oligarch and anti-corruption slogans, and part of his victory was due to his presenting himself as an "anti-system" candidate against the incumbent president who, once again, had taken advantage of his mandate to considerably increase his fortune. But Zelensky also ran on a promise to end the conflict in the Donbas. With this vote, Ukrainians clearly rejected the conservative-nationalist program of Poroshenko, who campaigned under the slogan "Army, Language, Faith".

On the Donbas issue, Zelensky, who was caught between two fires, was eventually forced to maintain the line of his predecessor: on the one hand, the Kremlin showed no willingness to make concessions in the negotiations; on the other, the national-liberal part of Ukrainian civil society refused to accept a scenario of capitulation to Russia and the separatists.

Zelensky started his mandate with an exchange of prisoners of war and withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from some towns bordering on the separatist republics. However, the resumption of negotiations with Russia, when Zelensky met Putin in Paris in December 2019, was met with protests in Kyiv supported by nationalist opposition parties, war veterans' associations, and far-right groups. In this new round of negotiations, Zelensky failed to secure local elections in Donbas preceded by dismantling of the separatist militias, a withdrawal of Russian troops and a return to Ukrainian control of its eastern border with Russia. Negotiations once again reached an impasse and the Kremlin decided to escalate the situation by invading Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Domestically, Zelensky also continued the neoliberal policy of his predecessor, in line with the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). With this decisive



change in geopolitical orientation, the structure of the Ukrainian economy gradually changed, with the share of industrial production traditionally exported to Russia decreasing and that of raw materials and agricultural production exported to Europe increasing (Kravchuk, 2016; Kravchuk, 2018). But the Ukrainian economy was mostly over-indebted and heavily dependent on IMF loans granted in exchange for austerity measures.

In March 2015, the IMF granted Ukraine a €16 billion loan against the backdrop of the economic crisis into which the country had been plunged since the events of Maidan and the start of the conflict in the Donbas. The conditions of this loan traditionally included a series of structural reforms to reduce public budgets (Dutchak et al ii, 2018). These reforms included increasing the price of natural gas for the population, reducing the number of positions in the public administration, and increasing the retirement age (Chernina, 2017a). The reform in the sphere of health provided for a change in the way health institutions are financed, according to the principles of self-financing and profitability, thus attacking the principle of free and universal medicine inherited from the Soviet Union (Chernina, 2017b; Chernina, 2020). On the user side, the reform foresaw the generalisation of private health insurance.

In education, the reforms begun in 2014 involved the “rationalisation” of the system by reducing the number of universities and schools through closures and consolidations, with deplorable consequences for access to education in villages and small towns. The reform of the scholarship system reduced the share of students who had access to it. As in the health sphere, the principle of university autonomy was being promoted (Muliavka, 2016; Chernina, 2017c). Finally, the Zelensky government passed a law to end the moratorium on the sale of agricultural land, which had dated from the fall of the USSR. The creation of a genuine market in agricultural land open to foreign investors had been a long-standing condition of Ukraine’s creditors, but was never implemented until 2021 (Soroka, 2019).

Some of these reforms had already been partially initiated, others only envisaged by pre-Maidan governments. Ukraine had been borrowing from the IMF since the 1990s, but in practice no government ever implemented all its conditions for fear of an explosive social situation. The political crisis of 2014 and the war in Donbas have finally opened the road to these reforms, allowing them to be presented as inevitable, as part of the war effort and of the process of European integration.

### The situation of displaced persons from Donbas

According to the last census in 2001, there were 7.3 million inhabitants (15% of the Ukrainian population) in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The war that started in

the spring of 2014 resulted in almost two million refugees. According to official statistics for 2019, 1.38 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were registered in Ukraine and several hundred thousand in Russia. Officially, the majority of IDPs resided before February 2022 in the Ukrainian government-controlled territories of the Donetsk (488,000) and Lugansk (217,000) regions, as well as in the capital (149,000). In fact, a large proportion of the displaced persons, the majority of whom are women and pensioners, have returned to the occupied territories because of difficulties in finding housing, work, access to social assistance, etc. The status of IDPs has allowed them to return to their country of origin. The IDP status has also allowed them to continue receiving Ukrainian allowances and pensions that had to be sought locally every month. By May 2019, 1.2 million people had crossed the line in both directions (Gyidel, 2022: 111).

The Ukrainian state failed to anticipate the refugee crisis: six months after the start of the war in Donbas, there was still no legal framework for the reception of IDPs. The law establishing the legal status of IDPs was only passed in October 2014. This status allows access to financial assistance — largely insufficient to live on<sup>26</sup> — and to specific social services, but it also restricts civil rights: IDPs are not allowed to vote in local elections on the pretext of their registration as temporary residents. Despite the provision of a number of temporary housing units that soon turned into ghettos, there has been a total failure to provide durable housing: only sixty-three families out of 1.2 million IDPs have benefited. The abandonment of the Donbas refugees by the state was accompanied by their stigmatisation in the media and distrust of potential “separatists” by part of the Ukrainian population, which in some cases resulted in discrimination in employment and in the rental market (Gyidel, 2022).

At the same time, dozens of voluntary organisations, including those created by the displaced persons themselves, such as the Vostok SOS organisation, were formed to take over the functions of the state: humanitarian aid, assistance in finding housing, work, support in administrative procedures, legal support (Kozlovskaya, 2014). Generally speaking, Maidan has had the effect of significantly increasing citizen involvement against a backdrop of a lack of confidence in the state and its inability to resolve urgent humanitarian problems. In this respect, a change can be noted compared to previous decades. In the face of disaffection with the welfare state, the 1990s were marked more by individual strategies of non-political personal initiative, limited to narrow circles of the private sphere, whereas the post-Maidan era has been marked by the constitution of a vast network of civic solidarity initiatives on the scale of society as a whole.

Important solidarity initiatives are also emerging in support of the fighters and ex-combatants in the Donbas. At the time of the outbreak of the conflict, the Ukrainian

army was very impoverished, badly equipped and undertrained. In April 2014, only 4% of soldiers had basic protective equipment such as helmets and body protection. To alleviate the situation, more than thirty volunteer battalions were formed to reinforce the regular army. At the time, the existence of these battalions was based solely on voluntary solidarity initiatives that provided uniforms, equipment and means of subsistence to the combatants (Stepaniuk, 2022). These solidarity practices have expanded today: while Western aid is mostly in the form of heavy weapons, the army and Territorial Defence units continue to depend on massive mobilisation of citizens for the purchase of basic protective equipment, medicines, drones, cars, etc.

### The problem of the far right

The issue of volunteer battalions naturally brings us to the issue of the far right in the Ukrainian army, given that the “Azov” battalion has received a disproportionate amount of media attention both in the Russian media and in Western anti-imperialist literature. It has become the partisan political issue *par excellence*. The invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was presented by Putin as a denazification campaign, in the wake of the “fascist coup” thesis promoted as early as 2014 to discredit the popular uprising against Yanukovych, on the pretext of the far-right presence in the demonstrations.

Unfortunately, part of the international left has uncritically taken up the propagandistic rhetoric of the Putin regime. As a result, when trying to appeal for international solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance, it is very tempting to bend the stick in the other direction, going so far as to deny the existence of the far right in Ukraine, or at least to minimise the spread of its networks within society and institutions. Such a counterpropaganda strategy, adopted by national-liberal forces, should not be ours. It is a question of having a realistic view of all the components of the armed resistance, without making our support for the resistance of the Ukrainian people conditional on the predominance of a purely class line within it.

The rise of the far right is our great shared danger today, in Ukraine as elsewhere, and the French left is surely best placed to understand this. For an internationalist left that does not lose hope in and conviction about the need for major social transformations on a planetary scale, the challenge is not to abandon the Ukrainian people on the pretext that there are a handful of neo-Nazis in the ranks of the army. Rather, it is to reflect on how solidarity with the popular anti-imperialist movement — in particular with its anti-capitalist, trade unionist, feminist, and anti-racist component — can help to marginalise the extreme right and prepare the ground for social struggles to revive on a progressive basis.

To achieve this, we must first understand the specificity of the far right in Ukraine.

At Maidan, the neo-Nazi groupings were a minority, but a minority that was the best organised and the best prepared for violent confrontation with the forces of order, which gave them a high profile within the movement. But unlike in France, the institutional far right has not had any electoral success since 2012. The Svoboda party fell from 12% of the vote in the 2012 parliamentary elections to 4% in 2014, then to 2% in 2019. This is partly because the entire political field has shifted considerably to the right in the post-Maidan context and the patriotic-nationalist rhetoric of far-right parties has become commonplace in the face of the Russian threat. But this electoral dynamic also reveals the lack of hegemony of the far right in contemporary Ukraine, its ideology being in open contradiction with the pro-European orientation of the majority component of the Maidan camp and with the deep concerns for political, economic and social justice of the large part of the population. The danger that these various organisations represent lies rather in their orientation towards street violence and the extension of their networks into the repressive institutions.

To give just a few examples, “Azov” is not just the name of a battalion, it is the name of a network of structures and projects of all kinds: in 2016, it formed the National Corps Party, ran its own veterans’ organisation, had its own sports sections, holiday camps and paramilitary organisation “National Militias” (Gorbach, 2018). The S14 organisation has also formed a paramilitary group called “Municipal Guard”, officially funded by the Kyiv City Council, which delegated to it during the COVID crisis certain surveillance and policing functions in support of the municipal police.

According to reports by the Marker Monitoring Group, the primary victims of extreme violence are feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists, as well as far-left activists. Organisations such as S14, National Corps and Right Sector systematically attack International Women’s Day demonstrations, Pride marches and conferences and exhibitions on left-wing issues, etc. Numerous attacks have been carried out against the Roma community, the Jewish community or Holocaust memorialists, and people considered “marginal”, including the homeless, political opponents and journalists deemed insufficiently patriotic, all this with relative indifference from the police (Marker Monitoring Group, 2021; 2022).

The active participation of radical nationalists in the armed resistance against the Russian invasion contributes to the legitimisation of their organisations. At the same time, even within the armed formations that are known as neo-Nazis, only a minority actually adheres to the ideology of their core. As the research of Coline Maestracci, who conducted dozens of interviews with Azov fighters, shows, those who sought to join from 2014 onwards were mainly attracted by the battalion’s effectiveness in fighting Russian aggression (Maestracci, 2022).

### The Ukrainian left in the face of war

Given the complexity of the issues at stake, it is not surprising that the Ukrainian left found itself very divided when faced with the events that unfolded from November 2013 to spring 2014 and beyond. But first we need to determine which organisations we are talking about, as some parties claiming to be part of this political family have long since lost connection with any emancipatory agenda.

This is the case of the CPU, the successor of the Soviet CP, which held a strong position until the early 2000s. In 1998 legislative elections the CPU obtained 25% of the vote and in 1999 its candidate Petro Symonenko faced Leonid Kuchma in the second round of the presidential elections. However, since the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, this party has never been an anti-capitalist and progressive party. At most, it played on the nostalgia of its electorate for the Soviet Union by promoting a social conservatism that in the 1990s formed the consensus among the political elites who were seeking to mitigate the social impact of savage privatisation. Basically, the CPU represented a convenient opposition party that could channel social discontent without posing any real threat to the oligarchic power in place. The party's leadership effectively integrated into the ruling class by participating in its patterns of corruption and by building up its own comfortable fortunes.

For the reasons already mentioned, the political polarisation around the pro-Russian versus the pro-Ukrainian/pro-European axis contributed to the marginalisation of the CPU. Under Yanukovych, the CPU formed a coalition with the ruling party, notably by voting for the repressive laws of January 2014. During Maidan, together with other pro-Russian parties and organisations, the CPU participated in the organisation of counter-demonstrations in Kyiv and other cities in eastern and southern Ukraine. Local CPU leaders approved the use of force by the riot police to disperse protests, echoing the Russian propaganda message about the "fascist coup" and rejecting "European values" with homophobic and racist slogans. According to Denys Gorbach, the Ukrainian CPU is ideologically closer to right-wing populist parties such as Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (National Rally) than to progressive left-wing parties, mixing as it does economic protectionism and a discourse on the superiority of Slavs with pro-natalist, anti-LGBTIQ+ and pro-Orthodox Church messages (Gorbach, 2016).

The same conclusions can be drawn about the Socialist Party of Ukraine and the Socialist Progressive Party of Ukraine. In this context, it is easy to understand why the average Ukrainian today declares himself or herself to be "anti-Communist": not because the working classes have definitively given up on the ideal of social justice, but because "Communism" is mainly associated with pro-Russian nationalism, the police state, social conservatism and the worship of Stalin. After the fall of Yanukovych, the

symbols and rhetoric of the CPU fell under the decommunisation laws passed in May 2015, but the party continues to field individual members in local elections. It was permanently banned following the invasion of Ukraine, along with other “pro-Russian” parties.

The “new left” that is independent of the institutional parties was deeply divided, firstly over the analysis of the Maidan and secondly over the war in the Donbas. On the one hand, the Stalinist party Borotba (Struggle) saw Maidan as a revolt of the national-liberal petty bourgeoisie. Borotba ended up siding with the anti-Maidan in the eastern and southern cities, whose first demonstrations were marked by an eclectic mix of Communist, pan-Russian and clerical slogans. Several of the party’s activists died in the tragic fire at the trade union headquarters in Odessa in May 2014. Today, some of its activists still live in Donetsk. Some have been arrested by the separatist powers, others have become openly pro-Putin or have gone into exile in Russia or Europe.

On the other hand, some left-wing nationalists joined the volunteer battalions to fight the separatist forces, such as the activists of the Avtonomny Opir (Autonomous Resistance), as early as 2014. The Autonomous Resistance was basically a national socialist movement. However, the organisation began to turn left from 2013 onwards, breaking with far-right organisations, and placing the class struggle rather than the nation at the centre of its political analysis while retaining its specific west Ukrainian identity with a strong nationalist dimension (Gorbach, 2015). It has developed an eclectic ideology and activity that combines the glorification of Stepan Bandera’s Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and participation in the torch marches, with organising Nestor Makhno memorial marches and participation in May Day and trade union demonstrations.

The progressive radical left, with the goal of uniting different grassroots socialist, feminist, trade unionist, environmentalist, and anti-racist initiatives, is represented in Ukraine by an organisation called Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement). It was launched in 2015 by the Trotskyist organisation Liva Opositsia (Left Opposition), which itself came out of the Organizatziya marksistiv (Organisation of Marxists), that worked alongside Borotba until 2011. Social Movement is part of the radical left which at the time gave critical support to the Maidan, identifying with the working classes who took part in the demonstrations with the desire for justice — justice in the sense of respect for the law by the ruling classes who themselves make it, but also in the sense of social justice. Its activists took part in the demonstrations and were involved in many citizen initiatives. The anarcho-syndicalist federation Avtonomna spilka trudyashtikh (Autonomous Workers’ Union) and the student union Pryama diya (Direct Action)

also took part in the Maidan events, organising actions of their own, such as the occupation of the Ministry of Education.

Given the complexity and the situation in the Donbas, the positions of this left on the war were however marked by a certain hesitation. On the one hand, while emphasising Russia's responsibility for the outbreak of the armed struggle, it expressed its opposition to the more belligerent parts of Ukrainian society and their exclusively nationalist project, hoping that a diplomatic solution could be found for the peaceful and inclusive reintegration of Donbas and Crimea, on the basis of a dialogue with the local populations and, in addition, of conditions that would allow Ukraine as a whole to maintain independence from Russia.

On the other hand, the radical left took care not to defend “revolutionary defeatism” nor strongly criticise the Anti-Terrorist Operation against the so-called people's republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, which had in the meantime become territories of lawlessness totally dependent on Russia. The activities of Social Movement have mainly focused during these years on the fight against corruption and tax evasion, neoliberal reforms and privatisations, attacks on workers' rights, and for the advancement of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and the environmental agenda. The organisation has close contacts with independent trade unions and has often come out in support of strike movements by, for example, health, transport and mine workers.

The invasion of Ukraine marks a new turning point that buries any plans for peace negotiations in the framework of the Minsk agreements. The recent annexation of the four regions of southern and eastern Ukraine proves that the Putin regime has not and never had any intention of negotiating the status of the newly-occupied territories and that it will not back down in its desire to subjugate Ukraine unless it suffers a defeat on the military front — which the lightning counteroffensive of [August-September 2022] gives gives reason to hope for. From February 2022 onwards, the organisations of the radical left resolutely engaged in resistance against the occupation, joining the general popular momentum to defend the right of Ukrainian society to exist and exercise its self-determination. ■

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## Appendix 2

# Meet the Ukrainian leftists resisting Putin's war

## Interview with Social Movement's Nataliia Lomonosova and Oleksandr Kyselov<sup>27</sup>

*Nataliia Lomonosova and Oleksandr Kyselov of the Ukrainian left organisation Social Movement discuss the history and work of the organisation with Dick Nichols. Lomonosova is an editor of the web-based journal Political Critique and Kyselov is a student activist.*

Could you explain how Social Movement emerged as a left current after the 2013-14 Euromaidan protest? After all, there were all sorts of political currents at Maidan.

**Oleksandr Kyselov:** Although the Maidan protesters were driven by social grievances, from poverty and inequality to corruption and the authoritarianism of the government, the agendas that framed this discontent, both in liberal pro-European and in nationalist versions, were problematic for the left. However, it was clear that this was a popular movement, so all the left had to go and see what was going on. When the government tried to disperse it and set the police force against the protesters, the issue wasn't any longer whether you shared the idea of European integration, but whether you would allow this repression to happen.

With this understanding more leftists got involved, as rank-and-file volunteers, paramedics or even *Samooborona* (Self-Defence) members. There were also attempts to introduce libertarian/anarchist ideas in the discourse. Activists were organising education events and assemblies, putting forward an interpretation of what was happening from the left perspective.

### Was the left at Maidan basically a university student left?

**Nataliia Lomonosova:** Well, we had a strong student movement called Direct Action, but by the time of Maidan it wasn't as strong as previously, although it still existed. All the initiatives that were organised at Maidan, including the "Free University of Maidan" and the medical units were the result of different left groupings and individuals, including environmentalists. As an example, the medical volunteers would also do patrols of the hospitals, because the police were also kidnapping people from the hospitals: they were patrolling to make sure the police didn't do that.

On your website, you note that the embryo of Social Movement formed at Maidan in the "*Ten Points* of anti-capitalist and pro-labour demands countering the conservative nationalist and liberal mainstream". Social Movement is then founded as such in 2015, already with a working-class base, especially in the industrial city of Kryvyi Rih. How did you move from being a mainly student organisation to acquiring a working-class and trade union base so quickly?

**NL:** Well, there's the obvious explanation that you cannot be a student forever, so you grow up, your comrades grow up, and you all become workers and face the problems that all workers face in Ukraine (laughs). But then there was our strong focus on labour rights and a labour agenda, and the idea that we wanted to form an organisation that would represent the views and hopes of those who are not represented anywhere in the Ukrainian political system.

Politics in the Ukraine is limited to those who have money. We don't have ideological parties and basically working-class people are unrepresented in politics. They have problems demanding to be solved and that can only be done through classic trade unions.

This was our basic aim: to tackle this problem, to address the needs of working-class people — this unrepresented "category" of the population, so to speak — through driving trade union organisation. We have been helped in this because some of the most active people in Social Movement, like Vitaliy Dudin, are labour lawyers and experts in social rights, while others were, or became, trade union organisers. Others were researchers or journalists covering social issues.

### And this process started after Maidan?

**OK:** No, it started before Maidan because of the natural aspiration of the left to build connections with the working class. For example, many of the people who came to support struggles at, for example, Kryvyi Rih, were students who were taking time off study or during their breaks. Many leftists, especially from the alternative left currents,

have been seeking this connection. There was a discussion around Maidan within the Western European left about the extent to which it was dominated by right-wing nationalist and even fascist elements, influenced by the study that Volodymyr Ishchenko did for the Die Linke delegation to the Left group in the European Parliament...

**NL:** I may not have read it, but in general we are familiar with Volodymyr's position, and I think he exaggerates the weight of right-nationalism and Nazism at Maidan. Of course, Maidan wasn't dominated by the left, or left ideas, but I don't believe it was as nationalistic as Volodymyr has written. That's my personal position as an observer of Maidan.

**OK:** With regard to this question, there was and there is a problem indeed, and there are of course a lot of rather nationalist ideas circulating, but they might not in normal times be so rooted, so unquestionably held as they appear. However, when we have this constant Russian interference in our affairs it gives extra credibility to right-wing ideology and, emotionally, people could turn to their sort of answers.

For example, after this conflict started, after Euromaidan, there was a really weird atmosphere politically, due to the Communist Party's and Borotba's positioning, and, in a certain way, due to the way the old left phraseology was utilised in general: well, it was associated with Russia and wasn't enthusiastically welcomed. So, for a long time the alternative left focused on trying to rebuild from the roots. In Kryvyi Rih, for example, they were organising May Day for many years.

### Social Movement had a founding conference, I imagine...

**NL:** Yes, but it took place seven years ago and neither of us were at it. There was a plan to have the next conference in May 2022, to bring our members, especially our newer members, together to further develop our strategic perspectives and communication strategies, but the war intervened, so everything is on hold.

**OK:** We need it also because the program was adopted a long time ago and many things may have changed since. It's not comfortable to rely on the proposals that are out of date and don't answer to present needs only because they are the only ones having the legitimacy of being adopted by the convention. Currently, we often have to improvise. But if we decide to proceed with the registration of the party, we'll certainly need to have an updated program.

### How does decision-making take place in Social Movement?

**OK:** Main strategic decisions are made by the general congress; for operative issues, we have a council; its current composition was elected by a Zoom-based conference.

**NL:** But now, unfortunately, we have to make a lot of decisions very quickly and a lot

is going on, with an explosion of work, especially international work. We had some sort of international connections before, but they weren't as broad as they are now. And all this humanitarian aid is a big, big thing to do. So, we have to do a lot very quickly, via working groups.

**OK:** When the war started, there were daily online meetings, with more people taking part when there were important things to discuss. Most activities are done via working groups, but if there are more important decisions to be taken, the council can be called for this.

**What is the relation between Social Movement and the journal *Commons*? *Commons* is not the official journal of Social Movement, obviously.**

**NL:** Well, the left in Ukraine is not super-broad (laughs), and we all participate in many things. Like, we have *Commons*, we have *Political Critique*, the journal that I'm working for, and we have some more liberal magazines that sometimes write about labour rights but really in a different manner. So, there is not much besides *Commons* and *Political Critique* and some editors and writers are members of Social Movement.

It's not that the two magazines produce articles about Social Movement as such, but when we're doing analytical articles or social reporting, whom shall we interview or ask for background? Obviously, comrades from the Social Movement or the NGO Labour Initiatives with the greatest expertise. Or, if there is a workers' protest and Social Movement is going there to support the workers, we'll do an article about it and spread it everywhere to build solidarity. This way we try to make strong ties of solidarity between the workers, Social Movement and our magazine. Then, when something happens, they can write for us, we can be there and they can spread our coverage among their networks, and we all empower each other. So, it's not like there is a "party organ".

**NL:** I don't think Social Movement could presently sustain a journal of its own, but having the website, Facebook and the collaboration with *Commons* and *Political Critique* gives us the impact needed. It also means that we get out to sections of the left who are not workers — to artists and academics, for example.

**You're still trying to get registered as a political party, is that right?**

**OK:** We are not trying to do it at the moment, given the war. There are two requirements you have to fulfil to register a party. First, collect ten thousand supporting signatures, which will require some resources but is doable. And second, to pay a registration fee of around €10,000, which many may feel wrong about handing to the state for a piece of paper, especially at the present time. Our ultimate ambition is to do it in the future

but currently we're discussing whether it's the right time. We'll most likely proceed as soon as we feel that it gives us extra opportunities.

The Ukrainian trade union scene is complicated for an outsider to understand. There's the continuation of the old Soviet-era unions, such as the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU), dating from the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the Independent Miners Union of Ukraine (NPHU) as its main affiliate. And there are also smaller union centres, non-affiliated unions and new unions, like the nurses. Does the trade union intervention of Social Movement focus on building new unions, working in existing unions, or both?

**NL:** It depends a bit on what you mean by the term "intervention". We wouldn't be involved that much in building the new unions as an organisation, but we have active members of Social Movement who are trade union organisers.

### In existing and new trade unions?

**NL:** We are trying to build new unions, but we are also trying to get members of existing unions to join Social Movement, so that we can influence bigger audiences.

### How active are the old trade unions, which were once part of the governing system?

**NL:** I wouldn't say that they are totally inactive, that they don't do anything or don't have any power. We have collective agreements and sectoral agreements, between the ministries and the trade unions, and the FPU-affiliated unions can push for something in these agreements because they are officially represented. But I think there are big differences within the official trade unions. Some of them are basically non-existent, like the trade union of cultural workers, which just signs papers. But, on the other hand, you have the official unions of public servants or construction workers. They are particularly active, especially their youth wing.

**OK:** So, there are new unions, which were not a project of Social Movement, but some of whose organisers joined us, and there are members of Social Movement who have become organisers in the trade unions. To add to the complexity, the union our activists helped to create, the crane drivers' union, belongs to the official construction union, affiliated to the FPU.

### What about your work in the various social movements, how is that decided?

**NL:** We have our positions stated more clearly in spheres which are priorities for us

such as labour rights and social guarantees, and the ways for economic development of Ukraine. I think in these we have really strong positions, which we get across through our campaign articles. What is important to underline is that — of course — we have this climate protest movement, we have International Women’s Day on March 8, and we are starting to have an urban movement against unfair rent and speculative building development.

There are a lot of protests, for example, for better city development, and people involved will say “please don’t come with any political statements”. We will still go there with a political statement, and we’ll be the only group with one. March 8 is also a very good example. There are a lot of people there who share left views, but they have to have their own bloc within the demonstration and arrange this with the organisers.

**OK:** Last time [March 8, 2021], International Women’s Day was actually a huge success for the left, despite our participation being hurriedly organised. There is a tradition of big feminist demonstrations in Ukraine on March 8, but it is now controlled by liberal feminists. It’s not that they are raising wrong demands — they focus on the “glass ceiling” and the need for quotas — but the majority of women in Ukraine are working class, and for them such demands are not their primary concern. We were trying to bring a social, or even a socialist, message there. In general, where we’ve got clear positions, it corresponds to the interests and maybe expertise of the members. If we say little about some issue, it’s probably that we don’t have many people working in the area.

### To take a specific example, how was your intervention on International Women’s Day worked out?

**NL:** Well, first you need to apply to the organisers, saying that you want to form a bloc. Some of our members will do that. Then we all meet and think about what sort of statement we will write. Then we go there, and there’ll be other leftist people who are not members of Social Movement, but they will join our bloc with their slogans. We’ll also publish our statement on the website, and we’ll also discuss it with others, but it’s not like we spend that much time on that.

What we do spend time on is working out a concrete theme, because the main banner of the bloc is usually also about this theme. There was one year when the theme was about sharing domestic labour and the right of men to have paternity leave. Another year, we had the nurses’ protest, so we took as our theme the need for better wages for nurses and teachers.



Putin gave a triple justification for his invasion of Ukraine: the need for “denazification”, “demilitarisation” and legal protection for the Russian language. “Denazification” has become such a sick joke (especially after Odessa’s Jewish community asked not to be denazified) that Kremlin propagandists themselves are soft-peddalling it, while Russian military aggression has inevitably generated “remilitarisation” as the Ukrainian army and people resist. That leaves “legal protection for the Russian language in Ukraine”. What substance, if any, does the Kremlin’s claim of official discrimination against Russian have? What has been the effect of the invasion on that issue, which has been the subject of near permanent conflict in Russian-Ukrainian relations?

**NL:** Social Movement hasn’t published anything on the language issue since the war began, but personally I am rather critical of some parts of the Language Law [adopted by the parliament in April 2019, found to be constitutional by the Constitutional Court in July 2021 and reinforced by a new provision in January] and the Education Law. They really narrow the possibility of getting a secondary education in your national language [such as Russian, Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, Romanian and Crimean Tatar]. Before, it was possible to get a secondary education in this language and then pass your exams in this language. But if you look at it from the practical perspective, what’s the point of getting an education in a national language if the universities are in Ukrainian? You wouldn’t have a university in Ukraine that is teaching a subject in Polish, Hungarian or Russian...

**OK:** But you have it in Russian...

**NL:** But not officially, not as an official language of instruction.

**OK:** We had different streams in my university with both Russian and Ukrainian as language of instruction. Though I think there might be less space for Russian now, obviously.

**NL:** I think the government was pushed to react because of what Russia is doing, but I still think the language law could be different. It’s my personal position — but we have what we have.

**OK:** The law produces some types of ugly real-life situations where middle class activists go into cafeterias and restaurants and try to discipline service staff: “I asked you to speak to me in Ukrainian [and you didn’t].” Then they take out the smartphone. “Now I’m going to report you to a very high level.” For me, it looks very ugly.

Accepting that the law is really going to be applied — which is not guaranteed because after a new law comes in people often behave carefully for a couple of months and then forget about it — the language by default in public always has to be Ukrainian. So, if you go to the supermarket or the railway station, staff have to address you in

Ukrainian. All that means is that the first phrase they use should be in Ukrainian. But no one is forcing you to reply in Ukrainian, and as long as they understand your language you can both switch: “Can you speak Russian?”, and the conversation continues in Russian (or Hungarian, for example).

Also, all product labelling was changed to Ukrainian. Maybe that’s a sad story for small businesses that have to pay for this. But it’s nothing like what you can see in the Russian media.

**NL:** Whatever our shortcomings on the issue, I can’t imagine any Ukrainian president behaving towards speakers of languages other than Ukrainian in the way Putin relates to minority languages in the Russian Federation — on television making fun of people speaking in their native tongue.

**OK:** There is no worse enemy of Russian language, culture and people than Putin, because he’s using it, he’s appropriating it and it just makes things worse. Now, also on the emotional level, because many Russian-speaking people here refuse to speak Russian because “we don’t want to be ‘protected’ by Putin”.

### Finally, what does the left in the rest of the world most need to grasp about the present war?

**NL:** It’s important to maintain the distinction between the Ukrainian government and people. Here [at the conference of the Danish Red-Green Alliance] we’ve heard delegates saying the “government is neoliberal” and has passed bad laws etc, with the implication that leftists don’t have to choose between equal evils, Zelensky’s government and Putin’s. And the Ukrainian people? The left’s position has to be one of being with the people, and it’s important to understand that whatever criticism can be made of Zelensky’s government, it has the support of the people as far as defeating the Russian invasion is concerned.

Maybe for some on the left the Russian government is somehow a continuation of the Soviet Union and has maintained some of the good things it had, but it’s not. Russia is a neoliberal state — even more neoliberal than Ukraine — and it is chauvinist, expansionist and spouts exaggerated militaristic propaganda. If Ukraine were occupied under Russian “protection” there wouldn’t be any alternative way of economically developing the country. Of course, it’s questionable which way Ukraine will go if Russia is defeated — that will be determined by future struggles — but there’s absolutely no future for Ukraine under Russian occupation. Yes, the Western powers forced loans and a massive debt on us, but there’s no way things wouldn’t be worse under Putin.

**OK:** Also, the European Union, for all its shortcomings, still provides more social

democratic ideology, especially compared to that of our government, as well as avenues of appeal against bad decisions and policies of any Ukrainian government. There are mechanisms provided, for example by a human rights regime. In Russia there is nothing, and even less so in the “people’s republics” of Donetsk and Lugansk and in Crimea.

**NL:** Even at not so “high” a level, but at that of workers’ struggles for labour rights, the situation in Russia is much worse because of the absence of anything approaching the rule of law. For example, in the last year two nurses committed suicide after their labour rights were systematically abused and they experienced psychological violence and pressure from the management, but the prosecutors refused to take a case against the employers. Besides, independent union activists are often jailed in Russia. In Ukraine, the court system works to some degree. For example, last year a majority of appeals against violations of the labour law were actually won.

**OK:** Our government is also weaker and exposed to international scrutiny, to UN bodies and to European bodies. Ukraine is more transparent, and however bad the government might be, even if it wanted to violate basic human rights, its hands would be tied. ■

## **Appendix 3**

# **Socialist Alliance (Australia)**

## **Russia out of Ukraine! No to NATO expansionism<sup>28</sup>**

The Socialist Alliance condemns Russia's war against Ukraine, which violates the Ukrainian people's right to national self-determination, free from all foreign interference. The war is a catastrophe for people in both countries, which is why the Ukrainian resistance and the Russian anti-war movement are united in demanding an immediate and unconditional Russian troop withdrawal. We stand in solidarity with this call.

There are two conflicts in this war. We also recognise and oppose the United States' relentless drive to expand NATO up to Russia's border, to encircle it militarily.

As a consequence we support:

- An immediate halt to the Russian invasion and a withdrawal of its military from Ukraine's territory and airspace.
- The Ukrainian peoples' right to resist the invasion, to expel Russian armed forces from Ukrainian territory and to access the arms needed to achieve this.
- A return to diplomacy to de-escalate the situation and begin the withdrawal of Russian troops as a necessary step towards a just and lasting peace. This is a demand on both Russia and Western powers to abandon their war aims and allow Ukraine to live in peace. It is up to Ukrainians to decide under what conditions they might accept a ceasefire or peace agreement.
- A commitment from all sides to a peaceful resolution of the status of the Donbas and Crimea and a solution that respects the democratically expressed wishes of the people who live there.
- The permanent cancellation of Ukraine's external debt.

## The role of NATO & the US

The Russian government is responsible for this terrible act of war with its appalling impact on human life and the environment, including the potential horror of widespread radioactive contamination.

While the relentless drive by the United States to expand NATO up to Russia's border in order to encircle it militarily significantly frames the conflict, the Russian invasion has been a propaganda gift for Western imperialism, allowing the US and its allies to take advantage of Eastern European fears about the ambitions of Putin's Russia in order to boost military spending and adopt an even more hostile posture. The same approach is being applied to China through AUKUS and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

In both cases this has nothing to do with defending a "rules based international order" or supporting democratic transformation in Russia or China, as its proponents hypocritically claim, and everything to do with blocking competition and preserving profits. This aggressive "containment" policy actually has the consequence of reinforcing authoritarian nationalist politics in both Russia and China. The following measures are needed to contribute to a lasting peace:

- An immediate commitment to stop the eastward expansion of NATO. Like AUKUS, ANZUS and the Quad; NATO should be scrapped.
- All countries to sign the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. Negotiations leading to a new treaty or treaties to scrap all nuclear and long-range conventional missiles.
- Cuts, not increases, to war budgets, by both individual governments and negotiated agreements between governments.

## Putin's Russia

The assertion by Russian president Vladimir Putin that the Ukrainian nation does not exist but was an invention of the Soviet Union is absurd. His suggestion that there would be military consequences for Finland and Sweden if they joined NATO and reference to nuclear conflict was extremely inflammatory.

Putin does not represent the interests of the working people of Russia. His political project is based on authoritarianism, social conservatism and Russian chauvinism. He represents the interests of Russia's capitalist oligarchs and their desire to carve out their own sphere of influence in competition with Western capitalism. This project has no progressive or anti-imperialist role. Instead, Putin's actions make it harder to build a peaceful and more just world:

- The invasion of Ukraine has boosted the appeal of NATO in neighbouring countries and convinced many people in them that they need to remain allied with US

military strategy in Europe and beyond.

- With the focus on Putin's destruction in Ukraine, it makes it easier for the US and its allies to pose as the defenders of international law while they continue to unleash violence on parts of the world outside the gaze of the Western media (for example, in Palestine, Kurdistan and Yemen).
- We therefore express our solidarity with the Russian peace and democracy movement and call for the immediate release of all protesters who have been detained and political prisoners, and an immediate end to the repression of the political opposition and critical media. We do not support economic sanctions on Russia that hurt working people.
- We support Ukrainian left movements, trade unions, feminists and environmentalists in their defence of the country's labour, social and environmental rights and against attacks by the Ukrainian government and parliament.

Finally, we insist that while refugees from this war should immediately be made welcome in Australia, this must be in addition to the existing humanitarian intake and not at the expense of refugees from other places. ■

## Appendix 4

# **Socialist Alliance (Australia)**

## **Reject the war drive on China: For a foreign policy based on justice, human rights and climate action<sup>29</sup>**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) new *Strategic Concept* document, adopted at the Madrid Summit at the end of June, is the imperialists' attempt to give new meaning to this Cold War military alliance.

It said its "key purpose" is "the collective defence of allies". However, its focus on "cooperative security" marked out new ground. It said the Russian Federation posed "the most significant threat" to regional and global security, closely followed by the People's Republic of China.

Socialist Alliance condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a gross violation of international law and supports the Ukrainian people's right to self-determination, including the right to resist Russia's invasion. We call on Russia to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukraine.

However, in doing so, we recognise that the Western powers that are supporting the Ukrainian government are not motivated by concern for a mythical "rules-based order".

The recent decision by both Finland and Sweden to drop any meaningful opposition to the Turkish government's oppression of the Kurdish freedom movement and its genocidal invasion and occupation of northern Syria as a condition of NATO membership are proof of this.

The role of NATO is not that of a "defensive" alliance, or upholding liberal democratic values, but to ensure the United States and its western allies' dominance within the global capitalist world order.

NATO's role in the post-Cold War era in instigating the wars on Afghanistan and Libya and the subsequent devastation that it caused to both countries is a reminder that it is a barrier to building a world free of conflict and war.

NATO should not be extended to the Indo-Pacific, but abolished.

The governments of the wealthy "liberal democratic" Western nations are every bit as cynical and violent as Russian president Vladimir Putin.

However, the former mostly inflict their wars on the people of the Global South, and often try to subcontract the violence to local enforcers. Arming Saudi Arabia to inflict incalculable suffering on Yemen is a case in point.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has afforded the Western powers an opportunity to both weaken Russia and to build public support for much greater military spending.

This is the context of NATO — a Cold War relic — adopting a new aggressive posture in the world.

Not only are the US and NATO hoping to inflict a military and economic defeat on Russia, they have made it clear they intend to "contain" economic competition from China, including by force.

The Australia, United Kingdom, United States (AUKUS) agreement must be seen in the wider context of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the proposal to extend NATO to the Indo-Pacific.

Under AUKUS, Australia will be further militarised and turned into a US garrison. This includes:

- More deployments of US aircraft, surface and subsurface vessels and joint war games;
- Four new military bases;
- Two new bases for the militarisation of space;
- Greater cooperation in hypersonic weapons and cyber warfare, underwater systems, artificial intelligence and long-range strike capabilities; and
- Support for combined military operations in the region.

The Anthony Albanese Labor government was quick to support NATO's new dangerous blueprint and it has indicated it is prepared to support the US strategy of confrontation with China, no matter the cost.

The fact that former Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott praised Labor for continuing the Coalition's policies regarding defence demonstrates that the push for greater militarism and war with China is bipartisan policy.

A conscious propaganda campaign stoking fears about Chinese aggression has been promoted for years to build public support for greater military spending and confrontation — possibly over Taiwan. The primary aggressors in this new Cold War



in our region are the US and its allies, including Australia. At the same time, Socialist Alliance respects the right of the Taiwanese people to self-determination and is opposed to the forcible integration of Taiwan into the People's Republic of China.

Socialist Alliance also recognises the genuine concerns of the Uighur, Tibetan and Hong Kong people around large-scale repression and human rights abuses.

US annual military spending is triple that of China and has been for many years. Furthermore, China is ringed by US bases, which the US intends to supplement with a network of precision-strike missiles, along the so-called “first island chain” — a Cold War concept aimed at containing the influence of the former Soviet Union and its allies in East and Southeast Asia — as part of \$27.4 billion in spending to be considered for the Indo-Pacific region over the next six years.

Every attempt by China to respond is presented as proof of its hostile intent.

The determination by the US and its allies to hem China in, both economically and militarily, even at the risk of provoking another major war is reckless and shows no regard for the wellbeing of the Chinese people as well as small island nations in the region.

The existential threat posed by runaway global warming means that the next 10 years are critical for humanity to unite to prevent catastrophe.

But it is impossible to do this if governments spend billions on a new Cold War instead.

Socialist Alliance is committed to campaigning for:

- Australia to withdraw from AUKUS, ANZUS and the Quad;
- Closing all US bases and banning nuclear ships in Australian ports;
- Cancelling the plan to purchase nuclear-powered submarines; and
- No war on China.

Socialist Alliance stands in solidarity with all people's struggles against imperialism, war and occupation and is committed to supporting the anti-war movement and the newly-formed anti-AUKUS campaign groups. ■

# Notes

- 1 Federico Fuentes is a member of the Socialist Alliance national executive and editor of *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.
- 2 A version of this interview was first published in *Green Left* on February 3, 2022. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/yuliya-yurchenko-ukraines-independence-russias-invasion>
- 3 The Orange Revolution refers to the huge protest movement that occurred in late November 2004 following a second-round presidential vote that was marred by voter intimidation and vote rigging, and which saw Yanukovich declared winner. The protests forced the annulment of the results and a new vote. In new elections held on December 28, Yuschenko won by a clear margin.
- 4 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on November 18, 2022. <https://links.org.au/people-liberated-kherson-are-greeting-ukrainian-soldiers-russian-hanna-perekhoda-ukrainian-identity>
- 5 A version of this interview was first published in *Green Left* on April 6, 2022. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/ukrainian-socialist-future-demilitarisation-lies-stopping-russias-war-machine-now>
- 6 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on September 2, 2022. <https://links.org.au/vladyslav-starodubtsev-sotsialnyi-rukh-today-people-are-not-just-fighting-ukraine-destroy-russian>
- 7 A version of this interview was first published in *Green Left* on November 23, 2022. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/mineworkers-union-leader-please-stand-ukraine-and-help-us-win-war>
- 8 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on July 13, 2022. <https://links.org.au/ukrainian-feminist-viktorii-pihul-our-main-goal-now-win-war>. Emphases in the text are by Viktoriia Pihul.
- 9 <https://links.org.au/ukraine-right-resist-feminist-manifesto>
- 10 <https://spectrejournal.com/feminist-resistance-against-war/>
- 11 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on September 2, 2022. <https://links.org.au/putins-attacks-ukraines-agricultural-sector-are-deliberate-interview-mykhailo->

amosov-ecoaction

- 12 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on July 17, 2022. <https://links.org.au/russian-socialist-ilya-matveev-putins-war-ukraine-not-about-security-it-about-imperialist-interests>
- 13 A version of this interview was first published on *LINKS* on August 2, 2022. <https://links.org.au/russian-socialist-dissident-boris-kagarlitsky-putins-growing-domestic-crisis-people-will-not-fight>
- 14 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on March 18, 2023. <https://links.org.au/war-taking-place-same-reason-all-moscows-wars-colonisation-former-colony-does-not-want-remain>
- 15 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on January 19, 2023. <https://links.org.au/war-and-resistance-under-putin-interview-russian-socialist-movements-kirill-medvedev>
- 16 A version of this interview was first published in *Green Left* on January 10, 2023. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/razem-building-left-alternative-poland>
- 17 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on March 25, 2023. <https://links.org.au/tobias-drevland-lund-red-party-norway-we-need-nordic-defence-alliance-can-stake-out-third-position>
- 18 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on February 3, 2023. <https://links.org.au/christian-zeller-ukrainian-resistance-has-forced-germany-reconfigure-its-position-towards-russia>
- 19 A version of this interview was first published in *Green Left* on October 7, 2023. <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/we-cannot-leave-turkey-mercy-two-nationalistic-populist-alliances>
- 20 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on June 1, 2023. <https://links.org.au/ukraine-lulas-peace-plan-and-global-fight-against-extreme-right-interview-brazilian-socialist>
- 21 A version of this was first published in *LINKS* on January 8, 2023. <https://links.org.au/imperialism-and-invasion-ukraine>
- 22 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on September 2, 2022. <https://links.org.au/ukraine-war-imperialism-and-left-interview-british-socialist-phil-hearse>
- 23 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on January 28, 2023. <https://links.org.au/howie-hawkins-ukraine-solidarity-network-us-anti-imperialist-position-support-national-liberation>
- 24 References in brackets and footnotes are in the original text, unless otherwise noted. Translation by Dick Nichols from the French original in *Contretemps*. First published in *LINKS* on October 8, 2022. <https://links.org.au/questions-about-ukraine>

- 25 See <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/08/11/7362903/>.
- 26 40 euros per person and 120 euros per family, see ministerial decree of October 1, 2014.
- 27 A version of this interview was first published in *LINKS* on June 9, 2022. <https://links.org.au/meet-ukrainian-leftists-resisting-putins-war-interview-sotsialnyi-rukhs-nataliia-lomonosova-and>
- 28 The Socialist Alliance National Executive released this statement on March 1 which was later amended by the Socialist Alliance National Council on September 18. It was further amended at the Socialist Alliance National Conference on January 14-15, 2023. Available at <https://socialist-alliance.org/our-common-cause/2022-03-01/russia-out-ukraine-no-nato-expansionism>
- 29 The Socialist Alliance National Executive released this statement on July 22 which was amended by the Socialist Alliance National Council on September 18. Available at <https://socialist-alliance.org/our-common-cause/2022-03-01/russia-out-ukraine-no-nato-expansionism> ■

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**Feminist Anti-War Resistance** (Feministskiye protivoyennoye soprotivleniye, FAR) is a collective of Russian feminists founded in February 2022 to protest against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The movement has numerous autonomous cells around the world and inside Russia.



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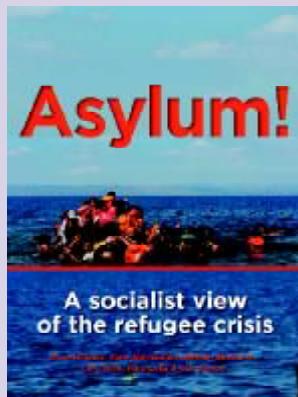
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