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Ukraine

Interview with miners' leader from Western Donbas

- Debate - 2022 - Ukraine -

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Mick Antoniwi, Member of the National Assembly for Wales interviewed Sergey Yunak the leader of the Western Donbas Miners' union, Dnipropetrovsk for Observer Ukraine in August 2014.

Mick Antoniwi: What is the PRUP (Ukrainian Miners Union) trades union's view of the current situation in eastern Ukraine?

Sergey Yunak: Currently our union organisation doesn't have a joint opinion. The Donetsk and Luhansk regions are under Russian control and propaganda and they consider that their rights have been suppressed. That is not our view. Our opinion is we believe it is an open war on the side of Russia and that this war is supported by local oligarchs or rich people and friends of Yanukovich's family.

Mick Antoniwi: One of the proposals from the Ukrainian government's programme of reform is the decentralisation of power. What is the Unions view?

Sergey Yunak: That issue had been raised by us five years ago in Kiev and put to the government, and that is why this issue is supported widely. We consider that the decentralisation of power will strengthen local authorities.

Mick Antoniwi: Has there been enough local level debate on this issue? Local discussions with trades unions, etc.?

Sergey Yunak: That has happened especially in our region. We share in and participate in discussions about decentralisation and have explained what it means. It is important that this debate is shared widely.

Mick Antoniwi: In some UK papers it is suggested there is a threat to the Russian language.

Sergey Yunak: This is real propaganda of Russia. There is no threat to the Russian language in Ukraine. All our documents, files, negotiations are conducted in the Russian language. We perform everything in the Russian language. There is no threat at all.

Mick Antoniwi: There appears to be some disunity amongst unions in Ukraine. Will recent events lead to greater solidarity across Ukraine amongst trades unions? Are there prospects of trades union candidates standing for the next parliamentary elections and are there prospects for a more united union voice in elections?

Sergey Yunak: First of all, we make all attempts to preserve our big society and our country as a great united society. As soon as the foreign countries, particularly Russia, maybe the US and maybe Europe stop interfering into our affairs everything will be ok. Our country cannot be divided, cannot be separated. That is why we are making all efforts to keep our country united. That is why our trades unions make all attempts to keep our country united, West, East and Central Ukraine, for a joined united society. There is no other way for Ukraine other than to be united.

Based on our last trades unions conference, held in Kyiv a month ago, it was shown that trades unions in all industrial areas from the east, which are strong organisations, and the west which are not so strong, and central

trades unions have the same desire to remain united. Our trades unions are united in this, we have spoken in our conferences in different languages, Russian and Ukrainian, but all trades union participants express the same desire to be united and to support our country.

Trades unions will provide their delegates and candidates to local, area, regional and central bodies for elections. We will participate and provide our candidates to all levels of authority. We will do it.

Regarding a united political voice – much will depend upon there being no interference from outside. That's why we intend to have a strong political union and organisation which will be ready to unite all forces. Unfortunately this is not yet strong enough in Ukraine. Trades unions currently are not yet ready to accept this political way, to unite all areas properly because they are still divided into different subsidiary unions. But we are ready for the struggle.

Mick Antoniw: What is the position of the mining industry in Ukraine with regard to pay and conditions? What are the most important issues affecting the mining industry that the government needs to address?

Sergey Yunak: The main demands and requirements of the unions are still the same. We will participate in all areas and be represented at local and national level. That's why we are not going to discuss only one issue such as wages. We are ready to participate in wider discussions about complex issues affecting the totality of living standards, and we will promote different programmes associated with redundancy, wages, welfare, closure of mines. We are ready to participate in discussions with government regarding these problems. For example, we have been working together with owners and the ministry of coal mining in Ukraine who adopted the decision to make redundant a lot of work places and reduce the salary of miners and close some mines. That's why PRUP started a struggle for our rights and we will participate in discussions with the ministry to stop the initiatives made by the ministry of coal mining.

Mick Antoniw: The separatists present a case that they are being attacked by fascist forces and fighting against fascism, yet some of them appear to be right wing fascist groups themselves. What is the politics of the separatist movement?

Sergey Yunak: We are speaking about nationalist groups from Russia?

Mick Antoniw: Yes, and who the separatists are and what they represent?

Sergey Yunak: This is a very important issue. We know that Russian propaganda says a lot about fascism in Ukraine. How can we call our soldiers and our young people who widely participate in this war fascists? They are from eastern, western and central Ukraine. This is only Russian propaganda. We haven't seen fascists or these bad ideas in our part of Ukraine. Many of the separatists come from Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh and other parts; it is not just Russia they come from.

Also, some local detachments of the Ukrainian army were released from the Eastern areas and replaced by other soldiers. They tell us that a lot of guns and detachments are not just from Russia, but Chechnya, Karabakh and different parts of the world; they are fighting for money, paid by someone. On our side we see no fascism at all. These people are, as we say, bandits.

Mick Antoniw: What impact has the rocket attack on the civilian aircraft (MH17) had on people in Ukraine?

Sergey Yunak: Ukraine does not use these missiles in this area because we don't have them there at all. These were

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missile launch systems provided by Russia and brought into the areas of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Mick Antoniw: What do people think about what has happened and those responsible? It seems likely it was a separatist group that acquired these missiles from Russia. Has this affected the way people think?

Sergey Yunak: This is a very complicated issue. Firstly, Russia has its own TV channels in the Eastern Donbas and they continue to provide their own propaganda, and they, Russia, says Ukraine was involved in that event. Then they say military aircraft were close by. They try to protect and provide obstacles, to save themselves. Russia provides their own propaganda for this purpose.

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