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Ukraine

Class Struggle in Wartime

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Ten months after the beginning of a bloody conflict, Ukrainian workers are confronted with the horrors of war as well as the offensives of a neoliberalism unconcerned with the suffering of a population exposed to martyrdom.

With about 15 million refugees, a GDP in free fall by 35%, nearly five million jobs lost, deaths – civilian and military – in the tens of thousands and, most recently, the systematic destruction of energy infrastructure at the beginning of a harsh winter, it is an understatement to say that the country is on the verge of asphyxiation.

Obviously, the priority interest for Ukrainian workers remains ending this brutal invasion, which necessarily involves the withdrawal of Russian troops from the entire territory. With 80% of deaths at work related to acts of war in the unoccupied areas, murders, tortures, disappearances and the physical elimination of all forms of protest in areas under Russian control, the struggle for a real improvement of daily life can only be conditioned by this central objective.

Unfortunately, war is not the only enemy of Ukrainian workers, who are simultaneously facing frontal attacks from their own government on labour rights and trade union freedoms. These reforms, initiated in 2019 by the Zelensky government, were blocked by the mobilization of workers and the coordinated action of the UPF and the KVPU, the two main trade union organizations in the country. Taking advantage of martial law, which considerably limits protest capacity, the Ukrainian right has opportunely returned to the offensive since the beginning of the war. One of the pieces of legislation, passed by the Ukrainian Parliament last August, deprives employees of small and medium enterprises, i.e., 70% of employees, of the protection of the Labour Code. Trade union confederations, trapped by martial law and facing a new anti-union law, are redoubling their international efforts to try to put pressure on the Zelensky government: a constitutional appeal, a challenge to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the incompatibility of the law with the application for entry into the European Union, an international petition promoted by the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU).

This disastrous panorama should not, however, hide the underground resistance, like that of the miners of Novovolynsk who, during the summer, refused to work for the new director accused of corruption: “The people are the government. We do not need new leaders imposed on us. Go back to where you came from, we won't work with you.” Although the class struggle is difficult in wartime, the workers, having taken over from a failed state in many areas, will not feel compelled to tolerate these attacks indefinitely.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).*

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