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Ukraine debate

**Let us build an international
movement against the
imperialist war! No to the
intervention of NATO, the USA
and the EU! Russian troops
out of Ukraine!**

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- Debate - Ukraine -

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This Declaration of the Tendency for a Revolutionary International (TRI), public tendency of the FI (ex-USec) was issued on Monday, 14 March 2022.

1°/ On February 24th, 2022, the Russian army, on the orders of Vladimir Putin, crossed the Ukrainian border and launched a particularly brutal invasion of the country, with more than 100,000 men deployed. Particularly intensive bombing rained down on the country's main cities, Kiev and Kharkiev. Civilians are deliberately targeted, as shown by the missiles launched on Freedom Square and on the University of Kharkiev. At the time of writing, a convoy of armored vehicles about 60 kilometers long is heading for Kiev, with thermobaric weapons, weapons designed to cause maximum casualties among the civilian population. According to the information we have received, the Chechen troops of President Kadyrov, known for their brutality and their exactions against the civilian population, have joined the ranks of the Russian military.

2°/ All this confirms the totally imperialist character of this war. Putin has not hidden this fact: he is taking up the Great Russian nationalist discourse, according to which Ukraine historically belongs to the Russian Empire. In his February 21st speech, one of Putin's main targets was the policy of the Bolsheviks at the time of the Russian Revolution. "Modern Ukraine was created entirely by Russia, specifically by Bolshevik and Communist Russia. This process began almost immediately after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a very rude way towards Russia itself - separating, tearing away part of its own historical territories." He blamed Lenin for "handing over" Donbass to Ukraine. With these attacks on the internationalist policy of the Bolsheviks, Putin clearly shows who he is and whom he represents: a representative of the new Russian bourgeoisie, born of the ruins of the Soviet Union, and with its roots in the tsarist feudal empire.

3°/ The large-scale invasion launched by Russia against Ukraine gives a new dimension to the conflict between Russian imperialism and Western imperialism on the backs of the peoples of the region. But it would be wrong to believe that the current war began on February 24th. Since 2014, in Donbass, more than 10,000 people have been killed in clashes between the Ukrainian army and the fighters in Donetsk, Lugansk and Crimea.

4°/ The Kremlin's current anger has its roots in the 2013-2014 uprising against the pro-Russian capitalist Viktor Yanukovich. Elected with a very low score, he brought the Ukrainian state closer with the Russian state, breaking with the policies of his predecessors, while pursuing a liberal, anti-social policy based on the squandering of public services. The revolt of 2013-2014 partly stemmed from anger against these liberal and authoritarian policies. But it was the petty-bourgeois classes that took the lead in this uprising, with an anti-Russian and pro-European Union orientation. This political line favored the presence of far-right groups such as Svoboda or Pravy Sektor, an openly neo-Nazi party claiming to follow the ideas of the collaborationist Stepan Bandera. Since 2014, with the emergence of neo-Nazi paramilitary forces in the Maïdan movement (financed by both the Ukrainian oligarchy and the West), massacres of Russian civilians, leftists, LGBT people have taken place in Ukraine. For example, the arson of the headquarters of Trade Unions in May 2014, where more than 50 people were burnt to death and murdered.

On February 22nd, 2014, the Ukrainian Rada - the parliament - deposed Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia, and appointed Oleksandr Turchynov, an ultraconservative homophobe, as interim president. One of the first measures of the new government is the repeal of the law on regional languages, removing Russian from the official languages (but also Hungarian, Moldavian and Romanian). Concretely, this means that from now on all official documents must be written only in Ukrainian, but also that city names and proper names must follow the Ukrainian spelling and pronunciation.

5°/ Faced with these measures of discrimination against the Russian-speaking populations in the east of the country, on February 23rd massive demonstrations broke out in the cities of Donetsk, Kramatorsk, Luhansk, Mariupol, and Sloviansk, in the Donbass region, and on the Crimean Peninsula. The demonstrators were demanding respect for their rights, i.e., the repeal of the law on regional languages, but also a decentralization of power from Kiev to the regions, and more autonomy. These demonstrations put real pressure on the government and the law on regional languages was never applied.

But taking advantage of this situation of division caused by the decisions of the government of Kiev, Putin deployed the mercenaries of the Wagner militia alongside the separatist fighters in Crimea, Donetsk, and Lugansk. On March 11th, 2014, the Crimean parliament declared the independence of the Crimean Republic. On March 16th, a parody of a referendum conducted under Russian military occupation, formalized the attachment of Crimea to the Russian Federation. In the following months, the separatist fighters of Donbass, supported financially and militarily by Russia, proclaimed the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic. This military intervention by Russia is clearly a way to use the demonstrations of Russian speakers for its own benefit and has nothing to do with the right to self-determination of the people of Donbass and Lugansk: it is a manifestation of the aggressive will of Russian imperialism towards Ukraine.

On May 25th, 2014, Petro Poroshenko, a billionaire who made his fortune in the chocolate industry, was elected president with 54.7% of the vote, with only 18 million Ukrainians participating in the poll, which could not be held in Crimea and the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. Immediately, Poroshenko developed an ultra-nationalist and revisionist policy: recognition for the fighters of the Bandera militias who participated in the extermination of Jews during the Second World War, recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, a law providing that all schooling in the country be in Ukrainian... It was under his government that far-right militias that had demonstrated on Maidan and then fought in the Donbass, be allowed to integrate into the Ukrainian army, under the leadership of the leader of the Pravy Sektor party, Dmytro Iaroch, who was appointed advisor to the Ministry of Defense in April 2015 (a position he has since left). With full support from the United States and NATO member countries, he increased the defense and security sector budget from 1% of the GDP to 5%. In November 2018, he declared martial law following an armed incident between Ukrainian and Russian ships.

At the same time, he pursued a policy of economic austerity: under pressure from the IMF, which criticized the slow pace of reform, he proceeded with numerous privatizations, attacked the pension system, while gas and food prices exploded. Poroshenko's unpopularity grew in the country. In the last two years of his mandate, the Gallup Institute indicated that, in the world, Ukraine was the country with the lowest level of trust in its government. Following a series of financial scandals (his fortune increased by \$400 million between 2012 and 2020), Poroshenko was largely defeated in the 2019 elections, which saw the victory of Volodymyr Zelensky, who had been an actor until then, known mainly for his roles in television series.

6°/ The current president, Zelensky, is a populist, elected based on a program filled with mixed bag of policies, combining the defense of direct democracy and the fight against corruption, in word, with ultra-liberal measures, such as the liberalization of the land market. Since 2001, a moratorium has blocked the privatization of public land and prevented almost all transactions on private land. This liberalization of the agricultural market has provoked demonstrations by small farmers. Indeed, the creation of a market for agricultural land in Ukraine allows oligarchs and large agricultural companies to continue to monopolize land, while satisfying the interests of foreign investors and banks.

Paradoxically, one of the bases on which Zelensky was elected was the loosening of the chokehold around Russia. He got his best scores in Russian-speaking regions, which are considered pro-Russian. A Russian speaker himself, he criticized laws expanding the use of Ukrainian in broadcasting and introducing Ukrainian language tests for civil servants. At the same time, Zelensky declared wanting Ukraine to integrate the European Union, and to put in place a referendum on Ukraine's membership to NATO.

7°/ Since 2014, US imperialism and Russian imperialism have been waging a proxy war on the back of Ukraine. Even before the Russian army crossed the Ukrainian border, this war had already caused 14,000 deaths in the Donbass region. While the "Minsk Protocols" signed by Russia, Ukraine, representatives of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), were supposed to ensure a cease-fire, none of the parties has respected these agreements. Between February and March 2021, the OSCE observed a 30% increase in ceasefire violations. While Russia amassed its troops on the Ukrainian borders and financed the separatist fighters in Donbass, at the same time the United States accelerated the delivery of weapons to the Ukrainian army. Between 2018 and 2021, the United States delivered 77 Javelin missile launchers. This number increased significantly in 2022 as 300 missile launchers were delivered in January alone. In 2021, the United States provided more than \$450 million in aid to the Ukrainian army .

These massive arms deliveries to the Ukrainian army are a continuation of the logic of NATO expansion pursued since the 2000s by US imperialism. Contrary to the commitments of Germany and the United States in 1994, 7 countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) joined NATO on March 29th, 2004. They were joined in 2009 by Albania and Croatia, in 2017 by Montenegro, and in 2020 by Macedonia. These accessions are obviously accompanied by large-scale troop deployments and military exercises, following the imperialist logic of bloc expansion, which has led to the establishment of military bases practically on the entire Russian border, except for Ukraine and Belarus. NATO and the European imperialisms therefore bear the greatest responsibility for the military escalation.

The war in the Donbass, for a long time the Western media was totally silent around this war, has provided a formidable training ground for far-right militants from all countries: on both sides of the border, on the pro-Russian side as well as on the pro-Ukrainian side, racist, anti-Semitic militias, explicitly claiming to be Nazis, are taking part in the fighting .

8°/ Imperialist powers are fighting over the riches of Ukraine. This country is in fact in fourth place in the world in terms of total value of natural resources: the first European reserve of uranium ores, one of the main world reserves of manganese, iron, mercury, and coal. Ukraine is also the breadbasket of Russia and Europe: the world's largest exporter of sunflower, the second largest producer of barley, the third largest producer of corn... And above all, this country has the second largest gas pipeline network in Europe (142.5 billion cubic meters of gas flow capacity in the European Union). Thus, the blocking of the commissioning of the Nord Stream II gas pipeline, linking Russia to Germany, risks reshuffling the cards among gas exporting countries. However, among the main LNG exporters - in addition to Qatar, Russia, Algeria, and Nigeria - the United States sells part of its shale gas . What motivates the war in Ukraine is not the defense of democracy in a country, as the media propaganda tells us. It is simply a war to defend the economic interests of Russia or the United States. The latter are the main beneficiaries of the disruption of trade between Europe and Russia, because they are the ones who will replace Russia in gas exports to Europe. Currently, 40% of natural gas consumed in Europe comes from Russia.

9°/ The war in Ukraine is the latest and most brutal jolt in the global crisis of capitalism, which sees the historical imperialisms weakened while other imperialist powers try to impose themselves. While the Trump administration had focused the main efforts of U.S. imperialism on the Asian continent and the Pacific sphere, the historic defeat it suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan have led it to shift its efforts to the European continent. This explains much of Biden's particularly aggressive and hawkish rhetoric towards Russia.

In Europe, France is facing a historic challenge to its dominance on the African continent. The withdrawal of French troops from Mali, even if not immediate and accompanied by redeployment to other Sahel countries, is as much of a defeat for Macron as Afghanistan was for Biden.

Faced with these historical imperialisms in difficulty, Chinese imperialism has begun to show its teeth with Taiwan.

The development projects of the "New Silk Roads" show the desire of this imperialism to expand throughout the Asian continent.

In this context, Russia, as an imperialist power, is trying to play its part. At a time when Western imperialisms are facing contradictions, it is playing a certain role as a counter-revolutionary police officer : intervention in Syria, deployment of Wagner militias on the African continent, financing of the far right in Europe and the United States... But, faced with the Chinese giant and Western imperialisms, Russia remains a second-rate imperialist power. Apart from oil exports and the arms economy, the Russian economy, essentially mafia-like and dominated by capitalists from the Stalinist bureaucracy, remains very weak . In addition, Vladimir Putin has been facing strong social and political protest for the last two years. In February 2021, following the poisoning of the liberal nationalist opponent Alexei Navalny, tens of thousands of Russians demonstrated . But it is especially in its border countries that the regime has been most challenged. At the end of 2020, the Lukashenko regime was faced with workers' strikes and demonstrations. To suppress this protest, Lukashenko had to call on Moscow. In January 2022, very powerful strikes of an insurrectional nature broke out in Kazakhstan. To suppress them, Russia for the first time called in the military forces of the "Collective Security Treaty Organization", a military alliance of Russia and the countries of Central Asia. At the time, all the Western bourgeois leaders, who today make themselves the greatest defenders of democracy and human rights, said absolutely nothing.

10°/ The dynamics of regional powers in this context should not be neglected either. Thus, Erdogan's Turkey, which in recent years had moved closer to Russia, particularly with their cooperation in the Syrian conflict, has denounced what it describes as NATO's passivity in the face of the Russian invasion, and has closed the Bosphorus Strait to Russian ships. On the other hand, Iran, which is also fighting alongside Russia and Turkey in the Syrian conflict, has sided with Moscow. In the context of its rivalry with Turkey, Greece is also trying to take advantage and appear as the most devoted partner of US imperialism in the region, providing key airports for possible NATO raids and sending weapons to the Ukrainian army.

In this little game of global imperialism and regional powers, supposedly opposing camps can find themselves ephemerally on the same side when it comes to preserving their financial and economic interests. Thus, the UN Security Council adopted on February 28th, with the support of Russia, a resolution extending the arms embargo on Yemen to all Houthi rebels. This resolution is a blank check for the coalition led by Yemen and Saudi Arabia, who already receive weapon shipments from the Spanish State and France.

This vote is a new demonstration that the Western and Russian imperialist powers, together with the regional powers, form a fundamentally counter-revolutionary arc.

10°/ All these events show the relevance of the theory of the permanent revolution. In the imperialist epoch, the bourgeois democratic tasks are inseparable from the socialist revolution. "For the countries with backward bourgeois development and, in particular, for the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of permanent revolution means that the true and complete solution of their democratic and national liberation tasks can only be the dictatorship of the proletariat, which takes over the leadership of the oppressed nation, above all of its peasant masses. " More than ever, what Trotsky wrote in April 1939 is valid: "We need a clear and precise slogan, which corresponds to the new situation. In my opinion, there is at the moment only one such slogan: for a united, free, and independent soviet, worker and peasant Ukraine! This program is first of all in irreconcilable opposition with the interests of the three imperialist powers, Poland, Romania and Hungary. Only the indecent pacifist fools believe that the emancipation and the unification of Ukraine can be achieved by peaceful diplomatic means, referendums, decisions of the League of Nations, etc. They are naturally not better than the pacifist fools. Of course, they are no better than each other, all those 'nationalists' who propose to solve the Ukrainian question by using one imperialism against the other. Hitler taught these adventurers a priceless lesson by handing over (for how long?) the Subcarpathian Ukraine to the Hungarians, who promptly massacred many of these confident Ukrainians. Insofar as the outcome depends on the military strength of the imperialist states, the victory of either bloc can only mean a

further dismemberment and even more brutal enslavement of the Ukrainian people. The program of Ukrainian independence in the era of imperialism is directly and indissolubly linked to the program of the proletarian revolution. It would be criminal to entertain any illusion in this matter. (...) After all these experiences, there are only political corpses to continue to place their hopes in one of the fractions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie as a leader of the national struggle for emancipation. Only the Ukrainian proletariat is able not only to solve this task, which is revolutionary in its essence, but also to take an initiative to solve it. The proletariat and the proletariat alone can rally around itself the peasant masses and the authentically revolutionary national intelligentsia. (...) The coming war will create a favorable atmosphere for all kinds of adventurers, miracle workers and seekers of the golden fleece. These gentlemen, who particularly like to warm their hands to national questions, must not be allowed within gun range of the labor movement. Not the slightest compromise with imperialism, be it fascist or democratic! Not the slightest concession to Ukrainian nationalists, whether reactionary-clerical or pacifist-liberal! No to 'Popular Fronts'! Total independence of the proletarian party as the vanguard of the workers! "

11°/ It is from these class criteria that Marxist-revolutionaries must appreciate the situation and the tasks that follow from it.

It is undeniable that today, a popular resistance is developing in Ukraine against the Russian invasion. Even in the predominantly Russian-speaking city of Berdiansk, demonstrators shout at Russian soldiers to "go home". As Marxist-revolutionaries, we must express our full solidarity with this popular resistance.

However, this should not blind us to the class character of the Zelensky government, nor to the fact that through this war, two imperialist blocs are opposed. Putin's ultra-aggressive policy has driven the Ukrainian government even further into the arms of Western imperialism. Today, armed by all the countries of Europe and the United States, the Ukrainian army is even more condemned to become only a subsidiary of NATO.

That is why for Marxist-revolutionaries it's impossible to demand the delivery of arms by the Western states to the Ukrainian state ; because the delivery of arms to Ukraine will neither contribute to pacify the region nor to strengthen the class positions in Ukraine. On the contrary, it means aggravating the spiral of war in the region, for which Ukrainian civilians will pay with their lives, and the working classes of Europe with policies of inflation and austerity, just to help strengthen the imperialist interests of the US and NATO. We are told that without the arms of the West, the Ukrainian army is doomed, while a defeat of Putin would be a support for the revolutionary struggles. This argument is more than questionable. Since 2011, Western states have poured a lot of weapons into Libya and Syria: has this helped in any way the development of revolutionary struggles there? On the contrary, imperialist interference has only benefited the most reactionary. Libya is now in the grip of appalling chaos - one of the fields of confrontation between Russian and Western imperialisms, and in Syria the regime of Bashar El-Assad is still in place.

As for the economic sanctions, we must clearly oppose them because they will fall first and foremost on the working classes in Russia. Far from detaching the population from Putin's regime, while thousands of Russians are taking to the streets against the war, these sanctions will be an additional argument for the regime to try to unite the population behind it.

12°/ The first task of the Marxist-revolutionaries in the period which sees the multiplication of military confrontations and the growing risk of a generalized conflict, is the construction of an international movement against the war and for the right of the peoples to self-determination. For this, the multiplication of demonstrations against the war in Russia, challenging the Putin regime, is a considerable point of support. For it is indeed from the heart of Russia that the forces capable of stopping Putin's murderous offensive will come. Everywhere we must take initiatives that allow us to express the refusal of the imperialist war by relying on the international experience of the movement against the war in Iraq.

The slogans that revolutionary communists must defend in such an anti-war movement are the following:

- ▶ No to the imperialist war in Ukraine: immediate withdrawal of Russian troops!
- ▶ Solidarity with the anti-war demonstrations in Russia! Against their repression, let us demand the release of all imprisoned demonstrators!
- ▶ Against imperialist interference in Ukraine! Withdrawal of NATO troops from Eastern Europe and the world! No to military and economic escalation!
- ▶ No to national unity behind our own imperialism or bourgeoisie!
- ▶ Not one penny, not one soldier, not one weapon for war in Ukraine. Against all intervention by "our own" imperialism!
- ▶ Open the borders and welcome all refugees, whatever their country of origin! No to racist sorting between "good" and "bad" migrants!

These slogans must be combined with an uncompromising denunciation of both pro-Putin and pro-Western campism. In Russia, the main task of revolutionaries is to fight against the Russian invasion. In the Western imperialist countries, the effort to block any NATO or EU intervention in Ukraine must be accompanied by the denunciation of the Russian invasion in Ukraine and also of the crimes committed by these imperialisms in a whole range of countries - be it European or American imperialism. Revolutionaries in all imperialist countries have the duty to remind people that "the main enemy is in our own country": they must therefore denounce the actions of their own imperialism, starting with the ever-increasing amassing of troops on the Russian border and the delivery of weapons to Ukraine.

13°/ On the question of support to the Ukrainian resistance, it is essential to start from the class characterization of each of the parties involved. The Ukrainian state is a capitalist state, the Zelensky government and the Ukrainian army are in fact subservient to NATO. In a situation where the workers' movement is terribly weakened, divided between pro-Western and pro-Russian, to ask to deliver arms to the Ukrainian state is absolutely not a position allowing to strengthen progressive forces.

The role of the Marxist-Revolutionaries is to block any possible imperialist intervention of their "own" country, be it direct or indirect (including the arm deliveries decided by many governments like the Spanish State, Germany, Denmark etc) and to seek to create links of solidarity with the progressive and working-class forces of Ukraine and Russia. Thus, the position of the organization Sotsialnyi rukh demanding "nationalization of strategic enterprises, as well as seizure of the assets of billionaires to guarantee the access of the public to medicine, transport, housing, food", is a first step to outline anti-capitalist demands challenging the direction of the resistance to the Zelensky government.

We disagree with the statement released by the FI bureau in favor of weapons delivery to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. For us, this is a concession to the pressure for national unity in the western countries.

14°/ The wars that are multiplying will be the pretext for new anti-social, anti-worker and plans for increased national security. Thus, in France, Emmanuel Macron has already announced an increase in the military budget, while declaring that "many economic sectors are suffering and will suffer, either because they depend on imports of raw materials, or because they export to these countries. The cost of basic necessities will rise again. These plans for austerity and social destruction are bound to provoke resistance. In all these movements that are going to break out, the task of Marxist-revolutionaries must be to maintain total independence from their own bourgeoisie by refusing national unity and to make the link between the social question and the question of war, to develop an internationalist position of struggle against the war and thus be able to put back in the center the necessity of the revolution for a world rid of the imperialists and their wars.

14 March 2022

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