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Ukraine solidarity - Britain

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We write as activists in Ukraine solidarity work and as activists within UCU (University and College Union). This experience has led us to consider what attitudes socialists and trade unionists should have to war, particularly how we support opposition to imperialist wars, critiques of the armaments industry and solidarity with wars of national liberation.

The labour movement in general and, also, movements of the oppressed, in particular the women's movement, has a long and honourable record of opposing wars and the arms industry. But that is not the same, in our view, as adopting a completely pacifist position. We believe that there are circumstances where armed resistance is necessary and should be supported, in particular wars of national liberation, as mentioned above. That raises an important question for the left: how do we combine our long-standing criticisms of militarism with support for struggles of this kind?

These questions have become increasingly relevant in recent years because of the war in Ukraine. We write from a position of support for the armed resistance of the Ukrainian people against Russian aggression. In this context, we have seen sections of the left, working jointly with anti-war/peace groups adopting pacifist or semi-pacifist positions with regard to Ukraine. These people move seamlessly from calling for 'welfare not warfare' to a call for stopping weapons supplies to Ukraine, without recognising the implications of this for the Ukrainian people and ignoring the fact that it is contrary to what Ukrainian trade unions are demanding.

We have also experienced debates in which support for the right of Ukrainians to access weapons for self-defence is equated with being pro-war, pro-NATO, reckless about the dangers of World War III and nuclear war, and in support of western governments. We take the view it is entirely correct to be worried about World War III and the dangers of escalation of conflicts, but not to respond with politics of appeasement in which oppressed nations are asked to surrender the right to national self-determination or accept enforced partition of their territory. We would also oppose the view that oppressed nations are required to accept policies (whether domestic or foreign) which are determined by neighbouring powerful states, staying within a sphere of influence, whatever the wishes of their people.

We also believe that it is important to recognise that, in the contemporary world, where national liberation movements or countries fighting to maintain self-determination are often relatively weak economically and militarily in comparison to competing imperialist powers, such movements may need to receive military support, for example arms deliveries, from one or more of those powers. This again raises important questions for socialists. How do we reconcile this need with our ongoing struggles against imperialist domination?

These experiences have led us to think about what it means to be anti-militarist and how should we define anti-militarism. The following notes endeavour to map out a position which is anti-militarist but not pacifist and not in conflict with solidarity with the Ukrainian people. We do not claim they are exhaustive.

Demands

The notes below are set out in the form of demands or requirements. They represent conditions which we feel need to be met for necessary military support for progressive movements to avoid strengthening militarism. We have grouped them in three categories; those which are addressed primarily to ourselves, within the labour movement; those which are addressed primarily to national governments; and those which are directed primarily to international

organisations.

With regard to the first group, the requirements which we would argue should be placed on socialists include the following:

- No romanticisation or glorification of war; a critical approach to military ceremonies and memorials.
- Recognition that war damages the environment; support for de-mining operations and post-war reconstruction, including environmental restoration in Ukraine and other countries devastated by
- Opposition to racism, sexism, misogyny and other prejudices which can be related to war or exacerbated by it. Opposition to attacks on women's reproductive rights or pressure on women to
- Recognition of the human cost of war and support for war veterans and those injured or disabled in war. Recognition of the situation of refugees and others displaced by war. Recognition of the
- Preference for negotiations wherever they can be used to prevent war and obtain just settlements.
- Support for international organisations and NGOs where they can contribute usefully to negotiating just settlements.
- Support for equal rights among nations and countries, with no pressure on smaller nations to abandon their independence or accept being treated as another country's backyard.
- Recognition that there can be just wars.
- Support for the rights of self-determination and self-defence.

The demands that we would place on national governments, specifically in our home countries, include the following:

- Recognition of the rights of conscientious objectors and support for provision of alternative forms of civilian service for them.
- Nationalisation of the armaments industry.
- Progressive taxation on companies and the rich to fund any military spending. Rejection of the argument from governments that cuts in social spending are needed to finance wars. Defence of welfare provision in wartime as in peacetime
- No resources for prestige military projects designed to favour capital rather than to achieve concrete objectives.
- Democratic control over military spending.
- The right of members of the armed forces to form and join trade unions.
- Support for military veterans and civilians injured in wars, including care for both mental and physical health, education, employment, housing and income maintenance. Provision for refugees
- Military support for national liberation struggles and struggles for self-determination. This support should be provided without political restrictions which undermine the fight for liberation. While support may be unconditional, this does not mean it has to be uncritical.
- Nuclear disarmament, outlawing of biological and chemical weapons. Credit given to countries that do renounce nuclear weapons and measures to ensure they are not disadvantaged.

The demands that we would see as requiring some kind of international co-ordination, in order to be achieved, perhaps through international treaties, include the following:

- Support for 'rules of war' in terms of opposition to war crimes and unnecessary prolongation of wars. These include conventions designed to protect civilians, the civilian infrastructure and the environment during time of war, and conventions regarding the rights of prisoners of war. Support for war crimes tribunals so long as they apply to all countries.
- Support for economic, social and environmental policies which create peaceful development and remove at least some of the causes of war.

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Source: [Labour Hub](#).

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