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Ukraine debate

A critique to the decisions of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International concerning the war in Ukraine

- Debate - Ukraine -
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The Executive Bureau of the Fourth International has issued two statements on Ukraine. One before the invasion, on 30 January 2022, entitled "[Against NATO and Russian military escalation in Eastern Europe](#)"; and another one after the start of the invasion, on 1 March 2022, entitled "[No to Putin's invasion of Ukraine! Support the Ukrainian resistance! Solidarity with the Russian opposition to the war!](#)".

The first statement seems to keep equal distances from the parties involved in the conflict; it blames NATO and the US, as well as Russia, for the increasing military tension; it warns that a very dangerous confrontation is taking place in Eastern Europe with global geopolitical implications. We will not insist on the class-neutral and journalistic type of language chosen in many parts of the text ("it will be difficult to reach a flexible solution when both sides have made the situation very tense and are starting from positions of political weakness and internal institutional instability", "The maintenance and expansion of NATO, far from pacifying the continent's relations, is actually straining them - and can only encourage a grand Russian expansionist logic to the detriment of the countries situated between the EU and the Moscow-dominated Eurasian Union." etc.). This doesn't happen for the first time. Nor will we dwell on the fact that, although the statement recognizes the greatest danger, since World War II, of an armed conflict between two major powers, and warns of the first, in the last 60 years, threat of nuclear war (a threat which it considers to be more serious than all the previous ones), it does not end up in practical tasks. In the decision, there is nothing more than a general appeal to organize mobilizations for "de-escalation, peace, dissolution of the two military camps and the right of peoples to self-determination". A few days after the statement, at the meeting of the International Committee, which was held in mid-February, the Ukraine issue was not on the agenda.

We cannot, however, avoid insisting on the point of the decision referring to the issue of Ukraine's accession to NATO. There, the Executive Bureau finds that: "Russia's imperialist rhetoric and behaviour, ... has led a growing section of the Ukrainian population to turn to NATO". Then, after explaining that "The withdrawal of foreign forces (Atlantic and Russian) and the military neutrality of Ukraine are the only protection of its independence", it ends up in the position that: "it is up to the Ukrainian people - and not to blackmail and negotiations between great powers - to decide on their membership or not of NATO"!

We will pass by the (not insignificant) question of how even the most liberal and pluralistic bourgeois democracy functions and whether "it expresses" the will of the people or not. But, since when do we recognize the "right" of a people to integrate "their country" into NATO? Since when do we recognize the "right" of the people or the working class of a country to turn the territory of the country into a stronghold of imperialist armies? Joining NATO means setting up air force, navy, tanks and missiles, military bases for the imperialist armies, with the United States in the first place. NATO is a direct threat to the peoples and the workers of its own member states, but also to the peoples and workers of all neighbouring countries and, given the ever-increasing range and power of modern weapon systems, to the peoples of the entire world. Revolutionary Marxists recognize as legitimate the claims that are actually made by oppressed social groups, nations and national minorities, insofar as these claims concern unfulfilled bourgeois-democratic tasks, such as the national question or the right of the peoples to "national self-determination" in particular. Of course, whether revolutionary Marxists will support such a given claim depends not only on the general interests of the working class but also on the specific interests of the revolution. However, since when is the participation of a country in imperialist armies and institutions a "democratic right of the people"? How does the participation of a country in imperialist armies and institutions serve the general interests of the working class? With what a perversion of logic will the participation of a country in imperialist armies and institutions promote the world revolution?

In the second statement, after the Russian invasion, the analysis changes its centre of gravity. NATO and the West in

general are released from their responsibilities, that are all attributed exclusively to Kremlin and Putin.

As it ought to, the second decision begins with the condemnation of the barbaric imperialist invasion of the Russian army. It condemns the Putin regime and its attempt to build a strong repressive state using energy resources, military power, etc. Undoubtedly, Russia is an imperialist state that carries out a barbaric invasion within a neighbouring state, spreading death, destruction, and refugees. This invasion must be condemned without reservations, compensations or pretences.

However, while the condemnation of Russia, Putin's regime and the imperialist invasion is clear and strong, the same is not the case when it comes to the responsibilities of NATO and the regime of Kyiv. There, the terms begin to blur and become "relativized." For example:

Ukraine is an independent country that has preserved a regime of formal democracy. Russia has an authoritarian, repressive parliamentary system with far-right members in the Duma.

We wonder: is the Kyiv regime, by any criterion, more "democratic" than the Moscow regime? Even in the most typical sense?

The invasion of Ukraine is clearly aimed at imposing a puppet regime, subservient to the Kremlin and Vladimir Putin.

What is hushed up here, however, is that the current government of Kyiv is not "independent". The regime established after 2014 is typically Eastern European, far-right and extremely neoliberal, close to and dependent on the US and the EU.

Logically it [•••] should have been dissolved with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991, but successive US governments have not only kept it going, but they have also continued to expand it.

After the former Stalinists, who declare themselves "betrayed" by the imperialists' promises regarding the expansion of NATO, the Bureau of the Fourth International also wonders: why does NATO still exist, "logically" should it not have been dissolved? Instead of exposing the NATO leaders, who claimed that the Atlantic Alliance was a "defense alliance against the threat of the Warsaw Pact", and condemning their blatant hypocrisy, as not only did they not disband NATO but, on the contrary, they reinforced it even further after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, this formulation probably implies that the existence of NATO was "reasonable" before 1991.

We demand the dissolution of NATO, however this is not the question posed by the attempted annexation of Ukraine by Russian imperialism, ... US imperialism is only taking advantage of the headlong rush of the new Kremlin tsar. [emphasis ours]

The most important thing, however, is that in the second statement, the Bureau builds on the newly formed "right" of the peoples to join NATO, which it had launched with its first statement. More specifically, it states:

However, in some countries, which had been colonized by tsarism or subjugated by the USSR, joining NATO was supported by their populations in the hope that it would protect their independence.

and the decision concludes:

The fight against the extension of NATO to the East passes today through the uncompromising defense of the national and democratic rights of the peoples threatened by Russian imperialism.

We will pass by - although it is a major revision of the historical and approved positions of the Fourth International on the class nature of the USSR - this "historical continuity" from tsarism, to USSR and then to Russian imperialism. The way the issue is raised here, in combination with the claim that existed in the previous statement, according to which the right of a people to decide whether or not to integrate "their country" to NATO is recognized as a "democratic right of a people", logically leads to the following position: revolutionaries must unwaveringly defend the right of a people to join NATO if the latter so wish, and the struggle against the expansion of NATO to the East passes ... through the expansion of NATO to the East. This is a poor-quality piece of sophistry in order to cover up the political smuggling by the Bureau of the Fourth International.

Ultimately, it seems that Zelensky and the section of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie that has dominated the country since 2014 are waging a national liberation struggle as they fight for "their country" to join NATO and the EU.

In fact, the Bureau's positions are a combination of rhetoric based both on the social-democratic tradition of the Second International of the period before and during the First World War, and on the Stalinist tradition of the Popular Fronts starting from the 1930s. In the first case, the social-democratic parties, under various pretexts (the relatively superior democratic conquests and freedoms enjoyed by workers in "their fatherland", the supposedly more reactionary nature of the rival camp, the fact that rival imperialism undertook the first military action and is thus the aggressor and the "unjust" party), subjugated the independent organization and programme of the working class to their own imperialist bourgeoisie. In the second case, the Stalinist parties, under the Popular Front tactics, subjugated the independent organization programme of the working class to the "oppressed" national bourgeoisie fighting for "its independence", under the pretext of a so-called "national struggle".

Revolutionary Marxism and the Fourth International itself were built on opposing these policies. Revolutionary Marxists, in any case, fought for the formation of an independent politics and organization of the working class. In case of an inter-imperialist rivalry or war, a war that they considered unjust either way, they called on the working class not to side with any of the warring parties and to fight for its own historical interests by turning the imperialist war into a civil war. Respectively, in case of a struggle for national liberation, despite recognizing that the war of the oppressed nation is a "just war" and must be upheld, they considered political and organizational subjugation of the working class and its dissolution within the bourgeois camp, a betrayal.

Today, however, the arguments of Stalinism and social democracy are reproduced by the supposed heirs of revolutionary Marxism. The Bureau of the Fourth International formulates almost all these arguments in the above two statements: Putin started the war by choosing the headlong rush (American imperialism is simply taking advantage of the situation); the Putin regime is barbaric, anti-democratic and authoritarian, while in the West there are more freedoms (even in Ukraine there is a "formally democratic" regime); we must demand from "our governments" to impose sanctions and to send the weapons "requested by the Ukrainian people", which is identified with its government, etc.

In any case, this policy subjugates the interests of the working class to imperialism and bourgeois rivalries; it clearly sides with Western imperialism and the portion of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie that is allied with it. However, by employing sophistry, it attributes this "choice" to the Ukrainian people themselves. The Ukrainian people, pushed by Putin's barbarism, are seeking the "protection" of NATO and the EU! As they should, leftists, revolutionaries, are simply supporting the Ukrainian people and their right to self-determination.

Apart from being contrary to the revolutionary programme, the above position is also hypocritical. There has been no such a call for support to the armed resistance in the cases of Iraq, Afghanistan, Sahel, etc.

In fact, it is not the Ukrainian people, but the Bureau of the Fourth International, that picks sides, asking the Western imperialist camp to impose sanctions on Russia and deliver weapons to the Ukrainian government. Really, in whose hands does the Bureau consider that these weapons will be delivered? The imperialists are not naive and they have a strong class instinct: they ensure that the weapons they send go into the hands of those who, in addition to the war with the "external enemy", are also waging war against the "internal enemy", that is, the working class and the poor popular strata of Ukraine. That is why "western democracies" and NATO do not need to be "pressured" in the direction that the statement indicates. Western imperialists have not only already imposed unprecedented sanctions that go beyond pure piracy, but are also sending military equipment, of hundreds of millions of dollars, and all sorts of mercenaries, agents and "military experts" to fight for the "independence of Ukraine". For their part, the emerging imperialisms of China and Russia are also baring their teeth. In fact, the Bureau of the Fourth International, calls on Western governments to do exactly what they are already doing. Unfortunately, while the Bureau declares its opposition to campism, the Bureau itself falls into campism, and in fact of the worst kind: in support of the positions of "our own" governments, the West and NATO. Perhaps that is why it has not yet condemned two blatant violations of democratic and civil rights: first, the ban on political parties (from the centre to the left) collectively accused of being "pro-Russian" by Zelensky's government; secondly, the ruthless racist pogrom of Russians or citizens of Russian descent and the banning of cultural works (even the classics that are an integral part of the world cultural heritage) because they were created by Russian artists.

Our time is characterized by an unprecedented, in the post-war period, worldwide intensification of inter-imperialist rivalries. US, China, EU, Russia and other powers are competing on various fronts across the planet. Ukraine is one of those fronts, on the territory of which a relentless confrontation is taking place between the US-EU, on one hand, and Russia, on the other. The Ukrainian bourgeoisie is also actively involved in this conflict. It has long been divided into two rival camps that clash with rage in order to prevail. In this conflict, they have used all dirty means: bribery and corruption of the political leadership, blackmail and assassination, exploiting and/or inciting uprisings, coup d'état, supply of weapons to fascist groups and incitement of fascist pogroms, ban on political parties, exploitation of autonomist movements, attempts to join rival imperialist camps, civil war conflicts etc. The elites of Ukraine are not waging any kind of national liberation struggle and are by no means fighting for Ukraine's independence. On the contrary, they are sacrificing the Ukrainian people and the independence of the country in order to win in this confrontation. The victims of this conflict are the workers, the youth, the poor strata of Ukraine: they have paid for it with impoverishment, the violation of social and democratic-political freedoms, mass immigration, thousands of dead and hundreds of thousands of uprooted.

The invasion of the Russian army is the last (at least so far) and most dramatic episode in this relentless conflict. The spread of war and bombing, the destruction of cities, infrastructure, production units, the lack of basic necessities (water, food, medicine, heating, communications), the death of tens of thousands, the displacement and uprooting of millions, the occupation, the declaration of martial law, the military draft, the suspension of democratic freedoms, is the new reality with which the proletariat, the youth and the poor strata in Ukraine (but also in the entire world) were confronted abruptly, suddenly and without any preparation.

Marxist Revolutionaries and the Fourth International must be at the forefront of the struggle to defend life, rights, freedoms, the conquests of the working class, against war and occupation, against all imperialist interventions, and against capitalism. Yes, when the weapon of criticism is replaced by the criticism of weapons, they should be at the forefront of armed struggle too. But never under the banner of "their own" imperialism or "their own" bourgeoisie. They always fight for the independent political and organizational formation of the class, around the revolutionary-transitional program. In unequivocal rivalry with the capitalist system and the barbarity it inflicts.

Our times are difficult. Violence in its most brutal and murderous form is constantly spreading. But violence is the midwife of history. This does not only apply to revolutionary violence (which usually comes to the forefront of history belatedly), but first and foremost to the violence imposed by the world's rulers. It is certain that the war that broke out, as well as the wars that are being prepared, open up deep processes within the proletariat of Ukraine, of Russia, of

the whole world. The world's proletariat, the peoples of the world are faced with enormous threats to their very existence and physical survival. Revolutionary Marxists bear the duty to be at the front line of this struggle ideologically, programmatically, and in practice. The only reliable weapon for carrying out this struggle is the ideological, political and organizational independent formation of the working class in its struggle (unarmed and/or armed) for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In other words, the struggle to build revolutionary parties and organizations of the working class. But this is exactly where the main reason for the failure of the Fourth international lies, that is since it abandoned the task of building its own revolutionary sections and adopted the tactics of "broad" parties. It is the abandonment of this political and organizational task, and not the ignorance of revolutionary theory and politics, that condemns the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International to drag behind "its own" imperialist camp and, in fact, adopt all its policies. It is the abandonment of this political and organizational task that in fact nullifies the slogan-demand of the second statement, for which, indeed, it is worth fighting to the end and at all costs:

"For international solidarity with our own social camp!"

Central Committee OKDE-Spartakos

15 April 2022

Source [OKDE Spartakos](#).

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