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Works council elections in Germany reveal an upheaval

30 April 2022, by **Gerhard Klaas**

"Voting for strong works councils - more democracy in the enterprise!" is the slogan that social democratic organisations are now using. In fact, according to the union-friendly WSI institute, only ten per cent of companies have a works council and, for 28,000 companies, 180,000 mandates are awarded. This is about the same number of mandates as in municipal politics. Yet the upcoming works council elections are virtually ignored by the media.

The exceptions confirm the rule: in February, the election of the works council of the subsidiary of the American automotive group Tesla in Brandenburg made the headlines. The owner of the group, Elon Musk, is well-known to be an opponent of unions. This is why the IG Metall union has also described this choice as a "positive sign". But reservations were also expressed, as the elections were not held during the rotation period but, prematurely, on 28 February. And this advanced date excluded workers in production from voting.

Only management employees who had been with Tesla for at least six months were able to cast their ballots. A day later, on 1 March, at least a few production employees could have voted. The IG Metall union has nevertheless promised to fully support

the "management" works council. However, they will "carefully ensure" that the committee commits itself to all 12,000 future employees.

The Reichstag bloodbath

The demonstration of 13 January 1920 in Berlin has gone down in history as the "bloodbath in front of the Reichstag building". By noon, employees of most of Berlin's major companies had stopped working, including at AEG, Siemens and Daimler.

More than 100,000 workers finally gathered in front of the Reichstag at a session of the Weimar National Assembly on the works council law. Instead of mere participation, they demanded the "right of total control over the management of the enterprise" by workers, employees and civil servants in all private and public enterprises. The demonstration was repressed with machine gun fire, killing several dozen people. The next day, President Friedrich Ebert (SPD) decreed a state of emergency, many members of the USPD and KPD were arrested, and more than forty newspapers were banned.

Today, a works council has a say in

working hours, hiring, dismissal, health protection and remuneration. The importance of a works council for workers is therefore undeniable. But for many company boards and managements, this already goes too far. In start-ups, for example, where the boss and employees know each other, the simple fact of launching an election to the works council is perceived as a vote of no confidence. However, the representation of interests by a works council is a right guaranteed to employees.

The methods of combating works councils are manifold: they range from the complete prevention of elections through intimidation and the dismissal of employees even before they take place, to the splitting of existing committees and the moral harassment of active works councils.

In recent years, law firms have specialized in union busting or mobbing (harassment) of works councils. For example, Schreiner & Partner is known throughout Germany for advising entrepreneurs who see works councils as a problem. The law firm offers seminars entitled: "In the future without a works council: how to avoid, dissolve and re-elect the works council", "the dismissal of 'disruptive' workers", "how to creatively design reasons for dismissal."

Other managements hire new human resources managers, often also lawyers, to rid the company of unwanted employees. These are not only private companies but also public companies, which finance these lawyers with taxpayers' money.

Blows for employees

It is common for employers' lawyers to trigger veritable avalanches of lawsuits against workers and the works council. Complaints almost never have a chance of success, but they do result in burden and stress for the accused, sometimes even depressive illnesses.

In the field of environmental and human rights, as well as against critical journalists, this type of action already has its own name: SLAPP. This term means Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation. They are spreading more and more – as for example during the opposition to the construction of the Lobau tunnel in Vienna, with the intention of nipping the political participation of civil society in the bud.

Several organizations are mobilizing for a European legislative initiative that would sanction this practice, as already exists in the United States. At

company level, these SLAPPs have also been practiced for years but trade unions have not yet been involved in the legislative initiative launched by the European Commission which set up a group of experts in early 2021.

One thing is certain: employers and union busting endanger individual health, human rights and democracy. It is important to publicly denounce these practices of company management.

A small victory was achieved thanks to the information work of recent years. According to Article 119 of the Law on the Organization of Enterprises, obstructing works councils has so far been a prosecuted offence on the basis of a complaint and punishable by imprisonment – but it was only prosecuted if works councils or trade unions filed a complaint.

According to the agreement establishing the “traffic light” coalition which now governs Germany, this should change: “We consider in the future the obstruction of democratic co-management as an offence prosecuted ex officio,” it says. This means that prosecutors will have to investigate employers as soon as they become aware of a case of impediment or manipulation of works council elections, obstruction of committee work or preferential or unfavourable treatment of works council members because of their

function.

The effectiveness of this bill will, of course, depend heavily on the staffing and financial resources of the institutions responsible for identifying and prosecuting these crimes prosecuted ex officio.

But it is not the legal debate that is central, it is the resistance within the company. And not only in the context of the work of works councils. It is also a question of involving and organizing staff beyond the activity of the works council, for example in the form of works groups and trade union committees of representatives.

Recent examples show that organization within the company is worthwhile: Wikus-GmbH, the largest European producer of hacksaws for users in the steel sector, which employs more than 500 people, has been without a works council and collective agreement for sixty years. The directors had even hired the infamous law firm Schreiner & Partner. This was of no use to them: after a collective dismissal in 2020 and job competitions in the aftermath, an IG Metall trade union committee of representatives was created and, a few months later, an extraordinary election of the works council was held.

Source: *l'Anticapitaliste* from SOZ-><https://www.sozonline.de/>.

Candle Light to Be Rekindled in South Korea with the Oppressed People's Power

29 April 2022, by **Karen Yamanaka**

There was a growing demand for a political change in the latter part of the political term of the incumbent Moon Jae-in regime. But Yun Seok-yeol' proposal has not attracted support from centrists (39.5%) and nonpartisans (7.5%). In the election, Lee Jae-myung's popularity rating (38%) could not exceed Moon Jae-in's (43%) although the two candidates

belong to the same ruling party DPK [29]

Using “strike means” instead of “defence means” shows an aggressive character that is different from the conventional political policy. Also, Kim Yo-jong, a senior official and the sister of Kim Jong-un, issued two statements and said that Pyongyang would

retaliate with nuclear strikes if South Korea launched a pre-emptive attack in April. [31]

North Korea will continue to develop weapons which serve as a “nuclear deterrent” to the US in pursuit of “actual profit” to obtain maximum performance at minimum cost. Further weapon development will also

be an effective political appeal to population in North Korea, where the improvement of their livelihoods has not been achieved. [32]

On the other hand, the countries concerned cannot prevent further development of the “strike means”. The UN Security Council is not functioning. And sanctions applied only by the US has no substantial effect. In addition, South Korea is in the course of transition to the new regime and the political situation is unstable. The country’s primary concern is to stabilize the domestic political situation. And the country cannot show their willingness to keep the initiative on the burning issue of the crisis in the region. Then opportunities for human exchange and dialogue between North and South Korea have been lost. Reunification of families separated by the Korean War

(1950-1953) is stopped. And humanitarian aid to the population of the North and economic exchanges were suspended. Also rail or road networks between North and South Korea was suspended only one year after the connections in 2017. Moreover, Japan-South Korea relations remain deteriorating, and political cooperation between these countries regarding North Korea will be difficult.

In addition, the current situation of Ukraine is creating even more unstable and very volatile regional situations. Currently, Russia and China have shown themselves blatantly with sporadic passage of warships and military aircrafts to the areas around Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Russia and China stand together against the “common enemy”

in the North Pacific. They also tend to stand together against the US, which has been evident in the North Pacific. [33] The initiative which has been kept on the issue of the Korean crisis was destroyed in the face of all the powers operating in the region. And the denuclearization and de-escalation policies concerning the entire peninsula moved away. The ball is back again in Kim Jong-un’s court. And the geostrategic situation became more complicated compared with 2018, when Kim Jong-un took another “small step forward” by announcing the closure of the nuclear-related facilities under the condition presented by the US. For Pyongyang, the launch of ICBM Hwasongpho-17” may be just the beginning, or just a process for further nuclear development.

10 April 2022

IPCC WG3 report: from scientific rigor to social fable

16 April 2022, by Daniel Tanuro

Working Group 3 has just released its contribution to the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report, on greenhouse gas mitigation. [34] It complements those of WG1 (on the science of climate change) and WG2 (on risks and adaptation). The article below presents the main points of the document. It simply aims to make the main conclusions of WG3 available to activists, for information purposes. Although some remarks will be proposed in the conclusion, it is not a question here of repeating the ecosocialist critique of capitalist productivism and its impasse. It has already been done elsewhere and will undoubtedly be deepened in the future, by myself and by others (including on the basis of the WG3 report). [35]

The catastrophe is deepening

The report starts by taking stock of the state of mitigation. In fact, it is more a question of a failure to mitigate. Global emissions of all greenhouse gases combined have increased by 11% compared to 2010. Their volume (59 GTCO₂eq in 2018) is larger than ever in human history. Between 2010 and 2018, the rate of increase slowed down somewhat: 1.3% per year, compared to 2.3% during the previous decade.

Cumulative net CO₂ emissions remain the main driver of climate change, and among these are emissions from fossil fuel combustion. However, emissions of fluorinated gases (a group of gases that are several hundred to several thousand times more radioactive than

CO₂, some of which can remain in the atmosphere for thousands of years) are now playing a significant role in warming. Between 1980 and 2018, emissions of these fluorinated gases increased by 430%, while CO₂ emissions increased by 66%.

The increase in CO₂ emissions is due much more to the consumption of energy and materials due to rising incomes than to population growth. Between 2010 and 2018, the increase in average GDP per person increased fossil CO₂ emissions by 2.3%/year, while population growth increased them by 1%/year. Some countries have successfully decoupled economic growth and emissions, but in most cases this is relative, not absolute. The most emission-intensive activities have increased sharply over the decade 2010-2020: +28.5% for aviation, +17% for SUV purchase, +12% for meat consumption. The decoupling of

energy demand from economic growth is only relative and a substantial decarbonization of energy systems is only observable in North America, Europe and Eurasia. Globally, the CO₂ intensity per unit of energy has remained unchanged over the last 30 years.

Slightly less inequality between countries, more inequality within countries

Between countries, the inequality in emissions remains glaring, although it has slightly decreased over the last decades. Average greenhouse gas emissions of all gases combined per person in 2018 were 13.1 metric tons CO₂eq in developed countries, 14.7 metric tons in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 5.8 metric tons in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.7 metric tons in Asia-Pacific, and 4.2 metric tons in Africa and the Middle East. Between 2010 and 2018, developed countries (17% of the population) emitted 35% of greenhouse gases; the Least Developed Countries (LDCs, 13% of the population) emitted just 3%. When we take the consumption of goods and services in developed countries as a basis (which includes "grey" emissions - imported in the form of products manufactured elsewhere), we see a slight decrease in grey CO₂ emissions: from 46% in 2010 to 41% in 2015.

On the other hand, climate inequality within countries is increasing, both in terms of income (27% of income captured by the richest 1%) and in terms of emissions (the richest 10% cause 36-45% of global emissions, while the share of the poorest 10% is 3-5% (the two are obviously linked). Two-thirds of the richest 10% live in developed countries, the remaining third in "emerging countries"; most of the poorest 10% live in Sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia, Central Asia and Latin America. These regions are home to the 20% of the local population who do not have access to electricity and the 37% who do not have access to modern cooking facilities. The consumption patterns of the rich generate the largest carbon footprint: for example, 50% of air traffic is monopolized by the richest 1%. On the other hand, providing all humans on Earth with access to

modern energy would have a negligible impact in terms of emissions...

Technology is not fulfilling its promises

Despite all the capitalist assurances, the facts show that technological progress is not solving the enormous challenge of climate stabilization. The annual rate of emissions growth has slowed significantly in the energy sector (1.4% between 2010 and 2018, compared to 3.2% in the previous decade) and in industry (1.7% compared to 5.0%) but has remained unchanged in the transport sector (around 2% per year). Since 2010, cost reductions have been strong in solar (87%), wind (38%) and batteries (85%); agrofuels account for 90% of the renewable energy used in transport. But these achievements of green capitalism do not put us on the path to "zero net emissions" by 2050, which is essential to stay below 1.5°C of warming.

Moreover, the recent news on the energy markets shows how reversible these developments are (cf. the revival of coal production in China and the extension of shale gas exploitation in the USA, etc., as part of the "post-covid recovery" - not to mention the impact of Putin's war in Ukraine). From a productivist point of view, "green" technologies must therefore go hand in hand with carbon capture and sequestration (CCS), carbon removal from the atmosphere (CDR) and nuclear development. But these technologies are not progressing rapidly, in particular because of social concerns about safety and sustainability.

Projected emissions in 2030 are higher than government commitments, and these commitments in turn are not in line with the goal of limiting warming to below 1.5°C in the 21st century. The projected emissions gap in 2030 between nationally determined contributions (including conditional government commitments) and the pathway that gives a 50% chance of staying below 1.5°C without

temporary overshoot is 25 to 34 GtCO₂ equivalent (out of total emissions of 59 Gt!).

To measure the difficulty of bridging this gap, it is important to know that the existing fossil energy infrastructure will emit 658 GtCO₂ by 2030, and that this emission volume will increase to 846 if we also take into account the fossil energy infrastructure that is planned to be built. These estimates represent about twice the carbon budget compatible with the respect of the 1.5°C (NB: they do not include the emissions of the projected infrastructures in industry, building and transport)...

With a constant degree of capacity utilization, and without any modification such as CCS installation, it is estimated that, in order to stay under the 1.5°C, the lifetime of the existing coal and gas power plants, which is currently 39 and 36 years respectively, would have to be shortened to 9 and 12 years (less if the planned power plants are actually built). These facts are enough to measure how strongly the multinational energy companies have and will have their foot on the train of the capitalist "ecological transition"...

Transforming the system?

Without new climate measures, the average global surface temperature will rise by 3.3 to 5.4°C by 2100. Staying below 1.5°C requires rapid emissions reductions and fundamental structural changes on a global scale. According to the scenarios, limiting warming to below 2°C requires that global emissions (all gases) peak "immediately" (between 2020 and 2025). Few scenarios still show the possibility of staying below 1.5°C without a slight overshoot (0.1°C). In any case, too little climate action in the short term will make the climate goals unattainable in the future. Staying below 1.5°C with a 50% chance and a slight overshoot requires emissions reductions of 35-60% in 2030 and 73-94% in 2050 (relative to the modelled emissions level in 2020).

In the scenarios limiting warming to

1.5°C with a 50% probability and a slight overshoot, the carbon budget still available is about 525 GtCO₂ (the carbon budget only accounts for CO₂). This implies that carbon neutrality will be achieved by 2055. Taking into account all greenhouse gases, the year of net zero is postponed by about 12 years. Deploying CDR technologies obviously increases the carbon budget. Reducing emissions of gases other than CO₂ (methane, fluorinated gases,...) does not dispense with the obligation to reduce carbon emissions to net zero, but increases the carbon budget available for a given level of maximum warming. However, one must take into account the warming effect that would result from the reduction of aerosols that reflect solar radiation back to space...

"Just degrowth"...

We can then understand the need underlined by the IPCC for fundamental transformations in all sectors and all regions, through policies that reduce both CO₂ emissions and those of other greenhouse gases. An important point here is that the IPCC, for the first time, echoes some research that explicitly argues for a break with the capitalist constraints of "ever more". According to some researchers, climate stabilization cannot be achieved without a very substantial reduction in final energy consumption - a reduction so important that it necessarily implies a reduction in material production and transport.

These researchers are not neo-Malthusians: they all insist on the need for what might be called "just degrowth", putting social equality and climate justice on the same level as climate stabilization. This new path (in the IPCC reports, of course) echoes indigenous "buen vivir" theories. It is partly expressed through so-called "lower demand" or "decent living scenarios", or other (mostly unmodeled) proposals that reduce or completely eliminate the use of negative emission technologies (NETs), strongly advocate dietary change (less meat, especially beef), more easily meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and consequently reduce pressure on land,

ecosystems and people - except for the rich, of course. It is significant that the IPCC report echoes this, even if its overall orientation remains clearly focused on the needs of capitalist accumulation (as if this were a law of nature).

... or recourse to negative emission technologies

With regard to these needs of accumulation, the IPCC report substantially develops the danger of "locking-in" in fossil fuels. It sees - rightly! - a major risk of postponing the necessary measures beyond the 2020-2030 decade, under the pressure of "established interests". Globally, emissions from the energy sector must decrease by 2.2 to 3.3% per year until 2050 to stay below 1.5°C. Low-carbon technologies (note: this term, in the IPCC lexicon, includes nuclear) must produce 90 to 100% of electricity by 2050 (less than 40% today). At the same time, the share of electricity in final energy consumption should increase to 40% before 2050 to stay below 1.5°C (20% today). The stakes for the fossil fuel multinationals are enormous: because of a climate policy that is equal to the stakes, the "stranded assets" (the devaluation of capital) could amount to thousands of billions (trillions) of dollars...

As we have seen, negative emission technologies (NETs) are one of the ways in which governments can increase the carbon budget, postpone the "net zero" deadline, and therefore alleviate the threat of capital devaluation to the fossil fuel sectors. The deployment of these technologies is therefore necessary in most scenarios that limit warming to below 1.5°C (except for the "just degrowth" scenarios mentioned above). For the IPCC, CDR is used to counterbalance residual emissions in sectors where emission reductions are difficult (aviation, shipping, agriculture, steel, cement, petrochemicals).

The simplest and least expensive negative emissions technology is the use of CO₂ absorption by ecosystems. Comparatively, this IPCC report is

much more reserved on BECCS (bioenergy with carbon capture and storage) than the previous one. In the AR5, 95% of the climate scenarios were based on a massive implementation of this technology. Now the IPCC tells us that its mitigation potential "has declined", that its massive implementation could have opposite effects, and that more scientific research is needed on this subject. The same need for more research is cited for other technologies that some have touted as silver bullets: direct capture-sequestration of CO₂ from the air, fixing CO₂ by eroding and converting certain rocks into carbonates, etc. Of all these systems, the IPCC now tells us that they can have negative effects on ecosystem services and on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)...

Social Feasibility and Wishful Thinking: IPCC in Wonderland

Overall, according to the IPCC, the existing potential for emission reductions achievable by 2030 would cut emissions in half by 2030, and mitigation options costing less than \$20 per ton of CO₂ would account for half of that potential. But this requires high long-term investments in the early years, and profound transformations in the short term. This raises the question of social feasibility, where the IPCC finds that solar, wind, demand side management, building changes, energy efficiency, electromobility and urban system transitions face less resistance than nuclear and negative emission technologies.

In general, this report, like the IPCC WG2 report, is considerably less technocratic and "economistic" than the previous one. Like the WG2 report on risk and adaptation, it emphasizes the priority to be given to "equity" and "stakeholder participation" in the perspective of a "just transition". The authors note that individual behavioural changes alone cannot significantly reduce greenhouse gas

emissions. They stress that these changes must be embedded in structural, cultural and institutional change. They even emphasize the importance of social movements, especially youth movements, to move the lines against "established interests"...

At the same time, like that of WG2, this report is full of the profoundly unrealistic idea that it would be possible to make antagonistic social

interests converge to save the Earth's climate in universal harmony, without in the least questioning private ownership of the economy, competition for market shares, production for profit and the "produce for produce" that automatically follows from it. It would be enough to install new social norms. And to do this, it would be enough for 10 to 30% of the population, especially the socially visible ones, who have the means to

reduce their emissions, to avoid flying, to live without a car, to switch to electromobility, and to invest in low-carbon companies to become the models of a new way of life...

I am still fascinated to see how sharp and rigorous scientific minds prefer to tell themselves fables rather than draw the right social conclusions from their own analysis...

4 April 2022

Opportunism behind Imran Khan's anti-Americanism

15 April 2022, by **Farooq Tariq**

Since 17th August 2018, when elected as prime minister, Imran Khan had been friendly with the USA and its financial institutions. However, he was unhappy that Jo Biden never gave him a direct telephone call. Previously, he had a very cordial meeting with President Donald Trump in September 2019. On arriving in Pakistan after meeting President Trump, he declared his meeting as winning the second World Cup for Pakistan. Pakistan had won a one-day cricket World Cup in 1992 under his captaincy. He was jubilant when Pakistan got USD 6 billion loan from IMF just after he took power in August 2018, with harsh conditionalities.

All that changed once a vote of no confidence against him was tabled at the National Assembly on 8th March 2022. He initially challenged his opponents to bring together 172 votes, needed for change of the government at the National Assembly. He did not realize that over 30 of his PTI parliamentarians had defected already. These defectors were hiding at a place provided by the Sindh government. Sindh, one of the four provinces is not ruled by PTI. Sindh is ruled by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of Benazir Bhutto, assassinated by religious fanatics in December 2007. Now her son Bilawal Bhutto and her

husband Asif Zardari are leading the PPP.

Once Mr Khan got wind of defections, he alleged that millions of rupees were paid to buy the political loyalties of PTI defectors. He accused the United Opposition, which brought together arch rivals the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and the PPP together, of removing him from power through bribes and conspiracies. The PTI government had become very unpopular because of its bad governance and the unheard of inflation due to the implementations of the IMF-mandated conditionalities. This was the real reason for the defection of PTI parliamentarians who were of the view, and rightly so, that the PTI had lost popularity and they would not win the upcoming elections on PTI platform. The next general elections due in 2023.

In the meantime, the coalition government of Imran Khan also showed cracks in their ranks and several important allies publicly broke with the ruling coalition. As a result Imran Khan lost his majority in the parliament.

In absolute desperation, Imran Khan announced that his PTI would hold a historic sit-in against these political

moves and gave a religious touch to his rhetoric. At that juncture, he was using threats to disqualify his parliamentarians who had defected him/PTI.

On 27th March, his so-called million march was attended by less than 20,000 in front of the federal parliament where he waved a letter that he claimed was a 'message of threat' passed by a foreign power. He claimed that he got this letter on 7th March, a day before tabling of vote of no confidence.

The PTI Speaker of the National Assembly refused to hold a vote on the No Confidence motion in violation of the constitution. The United Opposition went to the Supreme Court against this unconstitutional act of the PTI government. The Supreme Court had rescued the PTI government several times prior to this hearing. The top judges were considered to be pro-PTI. After four days of hearing, the Supreme Court gave a verdict against the PTI and ordered the Speaker to call the National Assembly session and hold a vote on 3rd April.

The difference this time, was the so-called 'neutrality' of the military establishment during the crisis. No parliamentarian received any

telephone call by “unknown” persons as was the case in the past. The military establishment which had helped Imran Khan to come to power in 2018, was not happy for several reasons.

Imran Khan wanted to replace the sitting army chief, General Bajwa, with his own favorite: General Faiz Hameed. The military establishment was also in trouble because the army was being blamed for the bad governance of PTI government since the military establishment rigged the previous elections to bring Mr Khan to power. The apparent neutrality was a signal to the PTI allies and defectors to help the United Opposition in ousting Imran Khan government. But Imran Khan kept addressing the nation on television on almost daily basis before he was removed and in one of his final speeches, he named - apparently as a Freudian slip of tongue - the USA as the conspirator.

After high pitch theatrics, a vote of no confidence was held and Imran Khan was voted out. This was only possible through military’s covert intervention.

Since he lost power Imran Khan rhetoric against the USA has intensified. Imran Khan’s anti-America stand cannot be termed as anti-imperialism. It is an opportunist act to deceive people. It is an act of sheer desperation. It is an act of anti-imperialism of the fools. It is to find an excuse for generating public support. It is an exploitation of anti-imperialist feeling of the people of Pakistan.

Imran Khan ruled Pakistan for three and half years accepting all the harsh conditionalities of IMF and raised the prices of electricity, gas, petroleum products along all the kitchen items. He never raised the wages according to the level of price hike. He was a committed neo-liberal, staunchly anti-left who tried to do away with the pension system. He introduced a “health card” which allowed all the private hospitals to treat the patients at the public expense. This policy was aimed at pleasing the private hospital mafia. Instead of building new public

hospitals and medical colleges, he tried to privatized all areas of health sector. Most of sugar mill owners were from his party and the sugar price went up from 55 Rupees a kilo to 110 Rupees a kilo in three years.

In the realm of culture, he tried to ‘Islamize’ every aspect of state and society. Imran Khan, for instance, introduced “single national curriculum” to further introduce religion in education. In at least one province, the Punjab, even PhD scholars in sciences now have to study Quran. The school children are supposed to recite Quran on daily basis. He tried to employ 70,000 religious teachers at the school level instead of improving the present education staff.

Being an anti-American, his effort is to attract the conservative votes. “Death to America” was a popular slogan of the extreme religious fanatics including the Taliban and al-Qaida. There is a great difference between “Anti Americanism” and “Anti-imperialism”.

We as the left, are anti-imperialists and not Anti-Americans. Anti-Imperialism means opposing colonialism, imperial hegemony, and defending the right of self-determination. Progressive anti-imperialism means opposing all imperialist states, not siding with some of them against the other. Imran Khan says that because he went to Russia and supported President Putin during the Ukraine war, hence Americans wanted him out of power. For him, it is ok to side with Russia, a thoroughly imperialist state as opposed to the USA.

To quote Farooq Sulehria, a leftwing activist,

Anti-imperialism is freedom, for all oppressed, from all oppression. In contrast, an Osama bin Laden, or Ayatollah Khomeini for that matter, offers an anti-imperialism

that does not tolerate these values. Theirs is an anti-imperialism that chokes minorities and strangles small nationalities. Anti-imperialism represents liberation. One cannot be a liberator and an oppressor at the same time. The anti-imperialism that upholds Osama as its poster boy does not solve this contradiction. We have seen this anti-imperialism in action in Pakistan’s neighbourhood, exemplified by Iran, or Afghanistan under the Taliban where it was reduced to burqa and massacre of minorities.

Imran Khan’s “anti-imperialism of an opportunist” is the latest variety on display. His “anti-imperialism” is based on repression of women, religious minorities, trade unions, peasant organizations and all the political parties. He termed all opponents as traitors.

Imran Khan termed Osama Bin Laden a “martyr” in August 2020, while he was prime minister. His ministers termed this as slip of tongue. But on 13th April, 2022, while Imran Khan was speaking at mass rally in Peshawar, one of his charges against the US was that they killed Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan.

We never sided with religious fanatics when they were fighting NATO or American forces in Afghanistan as they were not anti-imperialists. Imran Khan is a softer version of extreme religious fanatics. Being “anti-American” implies more votes from the extreme right. This is sheer opportunism and not anti-imperialism. Internationally, an impression is being given that Imran Khan has been overthrown because he was an anti-American. Far from it, this was an afterthought to build a political narrative that could help find some support among the ordinary people. We must not be fooled by Imran Khan’s empty anti-imperialist demagoguery.

14 April 2022

Collapse on the right, threat from the far right, hope for an alternative on the left.

14 April 2022, by **Léon Crémieux**

But Macron's victory in the second round appears less automatic than in 2017 (when he won 66% of the vote) and this new identical duel should not mask the profound differences in the electoral situation following the first round.

First, abstention went up by more than 4% to 26.3% of those registered to vote. Since 2007, there has been a steady increase in abstentions, both in the presidential election and in the subsequent parliamentary elections (more than 50% in 2017). Young people (aged 18 to 35) abstained at a rate of more than 40% (29% five years ago) and workers at a rate of 33% (29% five years ago). Abstention represents roughly a quarter of those registered.

Alongside this, these elections mark a new collapse of the two traditional parties of the Fifth Republic, the Parti Socialiste (PS) and the Gaullist Les Républicains (LR) party. Between them, they account for only 6.5% of votes cast. In 2017, at the end of François Hollande's five-year term as President, the PS lost almost 4/5 of its votes. In 2022, the LR candidate, Valérie Pécresse, with 4.78%, lost 3/4 of the votes obtained by the party in 2017.

Collapse of traditional parties

In ten years and two presidential elections, these two key parties have collapsed. The presidential system has just devoured those who spawned it. Macron's electorate had already benefited in 2017 from the contribution of a major part of the traditional PS electorate. In 2022, most of it voted for Mélenchon or Macron and the Gaullist electorate

was distributed mainly towards Macron but also towards another candidate of the far right, Éric Zemmour.

Two examples illustrate these shifts:

In Paris, a predominantly PS city for 20 years, Hollande scored almost 35% in 2012. This time, the PS candidate, Anne Hidalgo, herself Mayor of Paris, won 2.17% of the vote while Macron won 35% and Mélenchon 30%.

Another example is Neuilly sur Seine, a chic suburb of the capital, a historic stronghold of the Gaullist party and the traditional right since the Liberation, where Nicolas Sarkozy was mayor for twenty years. In 2017, François Fillon, the Gaullist candidate, won 64.92% of the vote and Macron 23%. In 2022, Macron doubled his vote, approaching an absolute majority, while Zemmour won almost 19% and Valérie Pécresse only 15% of the vote.

These two examples illustrate the unprecedented triple polarization that appeared in this election, draining support from the other candidates with, on both sides of Macron, the extreme right and Mélenchon, a declared candidate of the radical left. Both Macron, Le Pen and Mélenchon will have appeared as "the useful vote" for one category of the electorate, marginalizing the other nine candidates to under 10% or even 5%.

Macron has clearly consolidated himself as the candidate of the bourgeois bloc. The employers' organization, MEDEF, had, as in 2017, affirmed its support for Macron, who follows neoliberal orientations in all respects and whose new programmatic points appeared to satisfy the capitalist groups, whether on the reductions of levies, aid to

companies, or the continuation of the neoliberal offensives aimed at health and national education. He has consolidated his support from the reactionary electorate since 2017, by showing himself capable of opposing the mobilizations of the *gilets jaunes* and those of young people in working-class neighbourhoods against police violence, as well as the peoples of the Antilles, Kanaky and Corsica, asserting themselves as defenders of the forces of repression. Also, in the face of the endless crisis of the PS and the LR, his candidacy for this position appeared the most reliable. The result was a clear strengthening of his electorate by a contribution of votes from the LR, while keeping most of the votes coming from social democracy among the upper ranks of the employed and well-off pensioners, appearing as a guarantee of stability and even as a bulwark against the extreme right.

Therefore, even among electorates traditionally voting for the right or social democracy in other consultations (municipal or regional), Macron has appeared, within the framework of the French hyper-presidential system, as a guarantor of security, beyond the propertied classes, for the social strata essentially spared from the precariousness and difficulties of everyday life. This need for stability has obviously been reinforced by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The specificity of the French electoral system, where the management of the governmental system is the exclusive responsibility of an individual and not of proportional representation in an assembly, has led to the collapse of the parties that have built this system over the last sixty years.

Strengthening of far right

The far right has been spectacularly strengthened in this electoral campaign with the consolidation of the RN and the irruption of the Zemmour candidacy. Macron and the mainstream media had largely cultivated identity and security themes in the months leading up to the presidential election. Just like François Mitterrand who had made Jean Marie Le Pen his “best enemy” in the 1980s, Macron cultivated the idea of a new inevitable duel with Marine Le Pen, presenting himself as a bulwark against the far right, and thinking he would once again benefit from the fiasco experienced by the RN candidate during the 2017 second round. Far-right personalities have also sought to get out of this trap by advancing the project of a recomposition of the right of the right, by building an alliance of the most reactionary wing of the LR with currents of the far right, aiming to extend the union achieved during the anti-LGBTI+ demonstrations of “La Manif pour tous” against same-sex marriage and medically assisted reproduction, an alliance in particular with those around François Fillon. building an alternative, cultivating homophobia and Islamophobia as well as a cult of uninhibited French traditionalist values, and openly welcoming the neo-Nazi currents that Le Pen had marginalized for the sake of respectability.

From this combination, with the support of Vincent Bolloré’s media group and Marion Maréchal, Marine Le Pen’s niece, emerged the campaign of a polemicist journalist from the Gaullist right, Éric Zemmour. The latter has for years circulated the most reactionary ideas and has been condemned several times for his racist and Islamophobic remarks. His project was to overtake Marine Le Pen from the right, reaching out to the most fascistic currents of the LR for a political recomposition. He had his moment of glory with media omnipresence in the autumn of 2021, advancing the idea that a third candidacy of Marine Le Pen would lead to a new failure. In the end, it

was the returning boomerang of this argument that marginalized Zemmour, with a vote for Le Pen appearing on the contrary, for her traditional electorate, as the only way to bring down Macron. It is this argument of the “useful vote” that limited to 7% the electoral impact of Zemmour and also that of the third far-right candidate, Dupont-Aignan.

This project is therefore ending in failure for the time being. But unfortunately, this first round will have confirmed the Le Pen vote as the biggest among white-collar and manual workers and its strong presence in popular circles, especially in the North, East and Mediterranean rim. Moreover, to try to strengthen her electoral weight in the popular electorate, she has emphasized her image as “the only candidate who can beat Macron” by developing a discourse that downplays the security or immigration issues in favour of the question of increasing purchasing power through a reduction in taxation and social contributions on low wages. While cultivating this popular image, she has done everything to appear credible to MEDEF and fully compatible with the frameworks of the European Union.

Consolidation but personalization of Mélenchon vote

The novelty of this first round was also the dual movement of the almost total erasure of the PS from the presidential panorama and the electoral consolidation of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Here too, this third “useful vote” siphoned off from the other candidates on the left, not only that of Anne Hidalgo, the candidate of the PS reduced to 1.75%, but also those of the EELV (Greens), the Communist Party (PCF), the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) and Lutte Ouvrière (LO). In the cities and working-class neighbourhoods or in the Antilles, many will have seized on the Mélenchon vote to block the extreme right from the 1st round and avoid having to vote Macron again to eliminate the threat of Le Pen. But the Mélenchon vote was also that of the

youth in the neighbourhoods confronted with racism, discrimination and police violence. Thus, in the Paris region, it took first place in the former “red belt”, lost by the PCF since the 2000s, exceeding 50% in Montreuil, La Courneuve, Aubervilliers, and totalling nearly 50% in the popular department of Seine Saint-Denis.

Similarly, the evolution of his discourse on nuclear power and the fight for the climate allowed his vote to also appear as a vote for action against climate change and the biggest vote among young people aged 18 to 35. All this dominated, erasing for many, his sympathy for Putin, especially during the massacres in Syria, and his ambiguous position on Russian aggression in Ukraine. Thus, in the weeks leading up to the election, a growing polarization took place on the left to strengthen the Mélenchon vote and make it possible for him to reach the second round.

However, Mélenchon also abusively personalized this election, a personalization corresponding to the “gaseous” character of his movement, La France Insoumise, an action network without any democratic structuring. Mélenchon himself, for this campaign, built an ambivalent coexistence between this personalization and the establishment around him of a broad collective, the “Parliament of the Popular Union”, aimed at playing the role of bridge between the candidate and the social movements. In this, he reiterated the attitude of the PCF at the end of the 1990s, seeking to assert itself as the spokesperson of the social movement in the institutions by integrating on its lists spokespersons for the trade unions and global justice movement. Similarly, La France Insoumise tried from the beginning of the campaign to impose a vote for Mélenchon as the only useful vote on the left, explicitly targeting the other left-wing candidates, while he himself announced his candidacy in November 2020 without ever seeking to conduct any debate with the other left and far left forces. Therefore, Mélenchon’s failure a stone’s throw from the second round is also that of a hegemonic policy and is not primarily the responsibility of the other left movements present in this election.

Rebuilding social and political left

Nevertheless, its failure and the division of the left forces which, however, gathered a total vote comparable to that of the extreme right (31.94% against 32.28% for the far right), now pose a political problem. Social forces and activist currents are seeking to overcome the failures and betrayals of the social democratic left and its submission to capitalist neoliberalism. The necessary debate on this failure and on the axes of a necessary political and social mobilization in the face of the ravages of capitalism has not occurred. Refusing to accept this situation was one of the essential messages of Philippe Poutou and the NPA's campaign given the anti-capitalist emergency. Also, Mélenchon's success proves the reality and vigour of these forces, but also its limits, arising the lack of will for convergence and common actions. Unfortunately, for the moment, beyond the second round of the presidential election, it seems obvious to La France Insoumise that the only political future on the left must be under the banner of the Union Populaire. They have already designated most of their candidates for the parliamentary elections in June in order to maintain and increase their parliamentary group in the National Assembly.

In any case, the next step is the second round of the presidential election. Even if the initial polls indicate victory for Macron, the gap is much narrower than in 2017. In the popular electorate, some will abstain, but many will vote Macron to block Le Pen, as was the case in 2017. This choice will be made reluctantly even if, after five years of violent attacks against the popular classes and faithful defence of capitalist interests,

Macron is seeking to adorn himself with a social language and an anti-fascist veneer to win votes on the left, even partially amending his project of new attacks on pensions.

This contribution of votes from the left is, with the abstentionists of the first round, his only reserve of votes left to win the second round, as he has already won most of the votes coming from the traditional right. But many among the popular classes will not be able to forget the orchestrated attacks against the *gilets jaunes*, the young people in the suburbs, the unpunished police violence, the reform of unemployment insurance and the promise of new attacks on pensions, the incessant gifts to capitalist groups, the colonial contempt for the populations of the Antilles, Kanaky and Corsica.

But a possible victory for Marine Le Pen would not be a trivial matter, despite the façade of respectability that she has adopted in recent weeks, even using Zemmour as evidence of her moderation. She is the heir and depository of all the most reactionary currents of the French extreme right and includes in her ranks the ideologues and defenders of racist, xenophobic theses, heir also of the currents most hostile to the workers' movement and the struggles for the emancipation of peoples. She represents support for the big French employers when the popular classes rise up, take to the streets, to defend their rights and when order is threatened. She takes up the cause of the forces of repression, against demonstrators, as she did during the demonstrations of the (*gilets jaunes*) in November 2019.

Not one vote for Le Pen!

So, under no circumstances could a Le Pen vote be a weapon of defence against Macron's current or future attacks. On the contrary, the election of the RN candidate would be synonymous with a qualitative worsening of the situation of the working classes, deepened divisions in the camp of the exploited and oppressed, made up of an exacerbation of discrimination and attacks against the racialized popular classes, as well as being synonymous with new attacks on the collective rights of employees and their organizations, against democratic freedoms. Similarly, a high score in her favour, far from punishing Macron's reactionary policy, would be an additional encouragement for him on the paths of his ultra-neoliberal and repressive policies.

Although there has been notable social combativeness in recent years in metropolitan France and the overseas départements and territories, in localities and workplaces, the political construction of our social camp to act and defend a project of emancipation is a project built on the rubble of social democracy. Mélenchon's electoral success can be a point of support if it is not synonymous with arrogance and hegemonic will and lack of debate. In any case, the assertive strength of the far right and the announcements of new attacks by Macron against pensions and the public health system, government passivity in the face of the climate emergency and the galloping deterioration of purchasing power show the immediate urgency of building a common political action front around the urgent questions of the day and the fight against capitalism. This question will arise in the coming weeks regardless of the outcome of the second round.

13 April 2021

Fighting for Ukrainian Self-Determination

13 April 2022, by Yuliya Yurchenko

What are conditions like for people in Ukraine now amidst this war? What is the state of the military and civilian resistance to Russia's invasion?

First of all, it's really good to chat with you and tell the story of this war and resistance from a Ukrainian and leftwing point of view. I think everyone knows that Russia's shelling has severely damaged whole cities, especially Mariupol, and killed untold numbers of people. Its troops and missile attacks have driven huge numbers of refugees out of the country and internally displaced even more people. Nobody knows the exact numbers.

Millions of refugees have fled to the surrounding countries and have been welcomed and given shelter and aid. At the same time, there have been instances of nonwhite migrants and refugees who have been blocked or sent to the back to the line. That has created some ugly clashes at the border.

I'm currently in Vinnytsia, roughly halfway between Kyiv and Lviv. It is considered one of Ukraine's quieter cities. We have been struck by Russian missiles but not as frequently as other places. We have lots of internally displaced people who've fled here and found housing in schools, hotels, rented flats, and people's homes. Networks of volunteers are providing them with food, clothing, and medication.

Since martial law was declared and medical supplies requisitioned for the troops, access to medicine is an acute problem. There are real difficulties getting prescriptions for insulin and blood thickening medications when people can't see their family doctors and when supplies are low.

So, people who are internally displaced face acute health issues, even as volunteers help them. We will only know the extent of the harm the war has caused after it's over. But people in mass numbers are paying an

enormous price in life, health, and especially mental health.

Nevertheless, the resistance is massive. People have volunteered to serve in the military in huge numbers, more than in fact the military could accommodate. Those who didn't have any previous military training were turned away, for now.

So, there are large reserves of people willing to join the military resistance, who were trained for fighting under the old Soviet system. Russia certainly cannot boast that. It does not have the political confidence to even call up reserves, because Russians have no convincing reason to fight, save some scarcely credible imperial myths.

For Ukrainians it's an existential fight. Our country's identity, territorial boundaries, and our very existence is under attack right now. So, the nationwide solidarity and mobilization in defense of the country has been great despite Russia's overwhelming military advantage.

People are not giving up, despite the inevitably dehumanizing impact of the war, the sexual violence, and the demoralizing images, videos, and stories of the destruction in whole sections of the country. We are turning back the Russian invasion. It's an all-out popular resistance that makes you feel very proud.

Few people expected this level of military and civilian resistance, including those who are most optimistic and patriotic in Ukraine. It also surprised the Western powers, who, I think, downplayed the threat of the Russian invasion and then thought that Ukraine would quickly capitulate. They thought it would be ugly but then be over in a couple of weeks.

Putin thought that too. So, the resistance has shocked the world. But it really should not have surprised everyone. Russia has triggered a resistance that is deeply rooted in a centuries-old fight of Ukrainians against Russian imperialism.

One thing that has been noticeable is the resistance among Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine. As we know, Russia has tried to exploit divisions between Ukrainian and Russian speakers in the country since the Euro-Maidan Uprising in late 2013. They seized Crimea and supported the so-called People's Republics in Luhansk and Donetsk. What, in the predominantly Russian-speaking areas, does the resistance look like?

The resistance in Russian speaking areas like Mariupol has been inspiring. It has exploded the myth Putin propagated that he was liberating Russian speakers from fascist oppression. No one can believe that anymore.

At the same time, we need to understand where the division between Ukrainian and Russian speakers came from. They were manufactured in public consciousness since the 2004 presidential campaign and became solidified after the Maidan uprising in 2013-4. Maidan was a popular uprising not so much about joining the European Union, but rather opposing the oligarchs who control the country, the government's brutality against protesters, and frustration with decades of lawlessness and corruption.

In that uprising, the far right, which was only a small part of the protest, played an outsized role organizationally. Pro-Russian oligarchs' media commentators, not to mention the Russian state, played them up on TV, depicting Ukraine as overrun by fascists. This is not to deny the far right in Ukraine or its inherent threat, but just to say that it was exaggerated for political reasons by Russia and its allies - reasons they used to justify their seizure of Crimea and their backing of Russian separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk, many of whose leaders were planted there by Russia.

The popular reactions in Crimea and

the so-called Peoples' Republics were complex. We do not have an accurate and objective sense of what people thought. But it's clear that many were afraid of infringement on their linguistic rights, but at the same time, many wanted to stay part of Ukraine.

It was a very complex picture that even divided families. Many also worried that they had no future in the country because of socioeconomic deprivation that either regime may bring. Sociological data reveals a complex picture beyond marginal errors or bias.

The military conflict between the Ukrainian government and its right wing paramilitaries Donbas exacerbated these divisions. It caused all sorts of atrocities on both sides. People fled the area, many into Ukraine and some into Russia.

As a result, the composition of Crimea and the so-called Republics have dramatically changed. But that doesn't mean that everybody in those territories are desperate to be part of Russia. We know that there is a lot of resistance in those areas to the Russian invasion.

In Crimea, the Tartar population, which was **oppressed under the Tsar and then by Stalin**, has **resisted the Russian state's repression**. There are also serious problems in the so-called Republics that have led to **deep alienation from the separatists** that control them. There has been deindustrialization and the closing of some mines. As a result, the unions have raised complaints against the separatist statelets and have **suffered human rights violations and repression**.

In reality, those so-called People's Republics are neither the people's nor republics. They're now under semi-dictatorial control and beholden to the Russian state. And Putin does not even trust their loyalty and reliability! So, in the buildup to the invasion, Russia started issuing orders to the separatist functionaries in these Republics to prepare to mobilize for the coming assault. Not everybody was thrilled about that, not even the functionaries. To enforce their loyalty, Moscow took their families to Russia - essentially as

hostages to **blackmail them into obedience**.

While Russia does have adherents in the separatist republics, there is a disapproval and some outright opposition to the war. That's true even in Crimea, where despite broader support for Russia, there is also dissent and opposition.

Let's take a step back from these dynamics to explore the underlying causes of the war. Why is it inaccurate to reduce the war to a straightforward inter-imperialist conflict between the US/NATO and Russia? How does this ignore the struggle for national liberation?

Reducing this war to conflict between the West and Russia overlooks Ukraine and treats it as a mere pawn between powers. That analysis denies Ukrainians our subjectivity and our agency in the conflict. It also suppresses discussion of our right to self-determination and our fight for national liberation.

Of course, there is an inter-imperialist dimension to all of this. That's obvious. But there is also a national dimension to it that must be recognized. And to recognize it, you have to put on your decolonial thinking cap.

You have to draw on all the lessons learned from national liberation struggles in Africa and elsewhere. Even in those cases where competing powers were involved, there was also the struggle for national liberation of oppressed people. And anti-colonial thinkers and leaders taught us to give voice to them and their struggle.

Ukraine is in a similar struggle. It is often forgotten that we suffered centuries of Russian imperialism, not least under Stalin during the Soviet period. That eased to some extent under Khrushchev.

Yes, Ukrainian was taught in schools, but mostly as a second language. Yes, Ukrainian culture was allowed, but often it was reduced to exoticized stereotypes. Beyond this superficial recognition of Ukraine, Russia - its language and culture - still reigned supreme. If you really wanted to make

it, you had to write in Russian, adopt Russian culture, and follow Russian artistic norms.

This cultural chauvinism has only intensified in Putin's Russia. As it was demoted internationally by the US, the Russian elite dreamed of restoring its rule over its past colonies like Ukraine to restore its sphere of influence. Of course, that brought Russia into conflict with the US, which remains the global hegemon.

In this conflict, Russia can in no way be considered a different project than the US and the rest of the capitalist powers. Just like them, Russia is a neoliberal capitalist state fighting for more land, resources, and profit. Its rulers don't care about improving the lives of everyday Russians who are exploited and oppressed.

In some cities like St Petersburg conditions are better. These have better infrastructure, wages, and pensions. But outside them, the country is dilapidated. Here in Ukraine, we hear that from captured Russian soldiers, usually drafted from smaller, poorer towns. They are absolutely shocked to see simple things like paved roads in Ukraine's villages and countryside.

The Russian regime, state bureaucracy, and oligarchs have fleeced their own country and now rule through repression and deflection of popular attention onto external threats of regime change and imperial fantasies of rebuilding their lost empire. That has led them into challenging the US and gaining at least tacit support from China.

This inter-imperial dimension should not prevent us from recognizing the centrality of Ukraine's fight for independence from both Russian and Western Imperial domination. And the imperial competition should not prevent us from seeing the common international class interests that cut across the conflict.

There are Russian oligarchs that exploit Russian labor. There are US oligarchs that exploit US labor. There are Ukrainian oligarchs that exploit Ukrainian labor. And there are Chinese oligarchs that exploit Chinese

labor. And transnational oligarchs exploit us all. That class analysis points to our common interests against this band of warring capitalist siblings.

Let's turn to a discussion of the development of oligarchic capitalism in Ukraine, which you analyze in your book, *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital*. What are its economic features and political characteristics? How does the current president, Zelensky, fit into these patterns or depart from them?

The last several decades have witnessed a massive expansion of the empire of capital. It swept through the global South after its developmentalist projects were undermined, weakened, and failed. The empire of capital did the same in Eastern Europe and Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Russia inherited all of the USSR's legal responsibilities, obligations under international treaties, currency, and access to capital. Under pressure of the system and its neoliberal advisers, Russia underwent massive privatization, oligarchs took advantage of free market policies to concentrate capital in their hands, and Putin built a new repressive, neoliberal capitalist state to oversee the country.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the other former republics were suddenly independent, without their own currency, and bereft of capital. In that situation, they had no choice but to turn to the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

Ukraine established its relationship with the IMF in 1992. Under its tutelage, the new Ukrainian government privatized state property, which was almost everything in the country. Of course, people had their own personal property like cars. But almost everything else from land to housing was owned by the state.

Housing, for example, was built by the state and given to workers attached to particular enterprises. Suddenly all of that was sold off. Workers could privatize - or "buy" - their homes on

the cheap, which is why home ownership is so high in Ukraine.

The same program of privatization was carried out in state industry. Shares were created for enterprises and distributed to workers as vouchers. But workers, who were impoverished by runaway inflation, needed cash to maintain their lives, and so sold the vouchers to managers. Similar things were done with land, water, and services - with a degree of regional and sectoral variation. The managers just gobbled up the country.

Essentially, we witnessed what Marx calls the primitive or original accumulation of capital. And there was a lot to accumulate for the new capitalist oligarchs. In the Donbas region, for example, there is heavy industry and lots of natural resources like natural gas, iron ore, minerals, and coal. The oligarchs-in-the-making just scooped most of it up.

In the process of seizing these properties, the oligarchs and their political and criminal networks built successful financial industrial groups. They are comprised of both enterprises and banks. These conglomerates are highly concentrated and diversified.

They wield this capitalist power to control politics directly and indirectly. Some oligarchs became politicians. Others used political proxies. They secured consultants, PR agencies, and political technologies trained in the West to create electoral constituencies to win elected office.

Their control of the state enabled them in turn to further accelerate accumulation in the 1990s. They had a free hand as European capital was preoccupied with Central Europe, Russia was weak, and multinational capital was not yet in the game. So, they plundered state property for their own enrichment.

These oligarchs also competed with one another. This competition overlapped with territorial and linguistic divisions between Ukrainian and Russian speakers. The oligarchs stoked these divisions for their own political gain during electoral campaigns. In the process, The

oligarchs turned preexisting and largely non-conflictual differences into new animosities and prejudices.

This was an effective strategy to divide and rule the population that kept resisting the plunder with waves of resistance from below, from the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Maidan uprising in 2013. These divisions were further amplified by the different oligarchs' relationships with the EU and Russia. They would play up the divisions to stake out relations with either of those powers.

All of this came to a head during Maidan. People rose up against the oligarchs and the government, right-wing nationalists exploited it, and their parties tried to hijack it. Russian separatists then set up their so-called republics, Russia seized Crimea, and the armed conflict emerged in Donbas. The fascist Azov Battalion developed in this process.

But let's be clear: Ukraine is not the hotbed of fascism that Russian propaganda claims. For example, the far-right parties were trounced in the 2014 elections. Their vote went down dramatically and they lost seats.

The election of Zelensky was a popular rejection of the chauvinist divisions and an expression of hope for peace. He's an interesting figure. Behind him are a set of oligarchic forces and campaigned based on a promise of peace and anti-corruption albeit naïve.

In the end, he's ruled like every other neoliberal politician, failed to secure peace, and oversaw ongoing corruption and oligarchic plunder. On top of that, he was exposed as incompetent at ruling. His rating went down as their standard of living plummeted.

Before the war, it is highly unlikely he would have been reelected. But now he's a war hero and guaranteed to win a second term if Ukraine exists as a nation-state with a democratic electoral process at the end of this war.

So far, we've mostly talked about the role of Russian imperialism in Ukraine. What about Western imperialism, especially its

economic policies?

We have endured the dictatorial rule of the Western states and their international financial institutions (IFIs). They have carried the prescripts laid out by Francis Fukuyama in the early 1990s that the free market and its logic of capitalist competition should be unleashed.

IFIs granted loans on the condition that the state withdraw from ownership of industry and services, deregulate the economy, weaken labor rights, and give preferential treatment and protection to investors all to supposedly improve the economy's competitiveness. The state's new role was reduced to maintaining social order.

In other words, protect the rich from the poor. Thus, far from democratizing the society, the free market prescription enables the authoritarian turn we have witnessed in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Ukraine.

The European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the IMF, and the World Bank allowed only certain types of economic and political policies. These neoliberal edicts were purportedly designed to improve competitiveness and efficiency, claims that are all of course debatable. In actual fact, they enabled the rise of the oligarchs and their competitive, semi-criminal, and in some cases openly criminal scramble for ownership of privatized industry, services, and land.

What they certainly did not accomplish was efficacy in public services. Why? Because if services are subject to competition, they inevitably exclude people by placing market-set prices on them. That undermines basic provision of universal services in everything from education to healthcare, which in turn weakens the social reproduction of capital's labor force. Austerity flows from neoliberalism. And far from expanding the economies of countries, it actually impedes their growth, producing underdevelopment.

Ukraine is a paradigmatic example. It was an industrialized economy with developed infrastructure, healthcare,

public services, and a highly educated and skilled labor force. The Western imposition of neoliberalism destroyed it. In 1991, its economy was the size of France; now it is the poorest country in Europe. That was not by accident. That was by design.

Each round of EBRD and IMF loans only make this de-development even worse. We are literally drowning in debt like countries in Africa, Latin America, and the rest of the post-Soviet region. Ukraine owes various international financial institutions and states \$129 billion, *which is nearly 80 percent of our GDP*.

How have Western and Russian imperialisms' interactions with Ukraine's rulers led to the divisions within the country, especially between Ukrainian and Russian speakers?

They have magnified such divisions. One key example of the dynamic that led to the Maidan uprising in 2013-4 and its aftermath. Then President Yanukovych had been planning to sign an association agreement with the European Union but backed out at the last minute.

Despite being a criminal oligarch, he had a point. There were a few instances where he actually hit the nail on the head. The agreement was not favorable for Ukraine, so he refused to sign it to everyone's complete shock. That triggered protests, which the government brutally repressed, setting off the mass uprising and the entire sequence of events I've described.

People were so surprised because Yanukovych knew the agreement's terms all along. So, he did not back out of it because of concern for Ukraine. The real reason he didn't sign it was that Russia and Russian-associated oligarchs pressured him to back out.

Many of these oligarchs' assets are based in Donbas in energy-intensive industries that depend on affordable Russian gas and oil for their production lines. These oligarchs started spreading the word that if the agreement was signed, energy prices would go up – as Russia was indeed

threatening, industries would close, and people would lose their jobs. This is in contrast to the Western section of the country, which has been historically tied to Western Europe. And businesses tend to be oriented more on that market than Russia.

Of course, it's more complex on the ground; business interests do not align simply along those territorial divisions. Nevertheless, the imperial conflict deepened divisions between oligarchs who then forged electoral constituencies based on allegiances to the West or Russia making new territorial divisions very prominent.

Once this took hold, the different oligarchic blocs and their politicians used threats to limit language rights to disguise their ongoing austerity measures, deflecting class anger into linguistic and cultural conflicts. That led to the emergence of the far-right Ukrainians and Russian separatists, with each side increasingly dehumanizing the other.

This is really disgusting politics. The oligarchic political factions made things out to be a civilizational choice between the West and Russia. The Western-oriented ones presented the EU – which, we must remember, is the source of so much austerity – as the hope for freedom and democracy beyond the Soviet past.

The Russian-oriented ones depicted Western Ukrainians as Russophobes and fascists threatening the linguistic rights of Russian speakers. They portrayed Russia as the last hope to defend them against this tidal wave of reaction.

So far, we have mainly talked about the imperialist powers and Ukraine's ruling class. What about the struggle of workers and the oppressed against the oligarchs and politicians and imperialist powers? What political and organizational obstacles have they run into?

Under the conditions I've described of oligarchic capitalism, we've witnessed growing civil resistance. That found expression in the Euro-Maidan uprising, especially after the police brutalized the protesters. People had

finally had enough. The police brutality tapped into years of pain and frustration with all the corruption, anger at police collusion with the oligarch criminal networks, and their repeated ability to escape any accountability for their abuses.

All of this resistance was reactive; it wasn't guided by a clear sense of an alternative program and set of demands. That enabled the right to hijack the revolt. They were organized and had forces to throw into the struggle. The ensuing conflict between Ukrainian government and the separatists partially dampened down the civil struggle.

But over the last few years, frustrations with the oligarchs and corrupt politicians deepened, and they repeatedly threw out one group of them to see another equally awful group replace them. Thus, it's a proper crisis of representation. There is no clear alternative yet capable of mounting a political challenge to the oligarchs and their politicians. And the left is sadly still rather small.

At the same time, there is popular struggle outside electoral politics, particularly among trade unionists. This emerged outside the old USSR unions, which were essentially company unions. New independent unions have developed within key industries (and even some small and medium size enterprises!). One such important union is in the railroad industry, which is the biggest employer in the country.

They have been a key element in the resistance to Russia's invasion. They have brought supplies to aging people under artillery fire. The mining unions have been particularly important, fighting against pit closures and defending wages and benefits. Medical workers have also started to organize.

People have learned that if the politicians don't enact changes, you must do it yourself through collective struggle in your workplace. They've even consulted the bigger unions and confederation internationally about how to organize.

This has really expanded in the

resistance as people look to one another for solidarity and support. In the last weeks, workers at various enterprises have taken it upon themselves to distribute goods to meet people's needs amidst the war, lots of anecdotal evidence of that from different cities. For example, workers at a local food warehouse learned that there were refugees in need of food or construction material warehouse managers gave away good of use for city fortifications. Talk about expropriating the expropriators!

In the midst of this war, the resistance affirms people's ability to affect change. That will be important after the war as the battle over how to rebuild it and in whose interests becomes the central question. I really hope that that spirit of collective solidarity can forge a new path for Ukraine once this hell is over.

This would open up new opportunities for the Ukrainian left. We will have to adapt our language a bit to make our program make sense to people who have really bad associations with the Stalinist past. Nevertheless, people are looking for collective social solutions to deep problems in Ukrainian and global capitalism.

Socialists have to merge with these struggles for immediate improvements in peoples and demonstrate that we have crucial ideas for how to rebuild our society. If we can do that successfully, we can help overcome the crisis of representation that has plagued the waves of resistance and offer a genuine alternative to the oligarchs and the right.

One development that Putin and the campist left have exaggerated for their own political purposes is the emergence of the far right in the country. What is the truth about the far right in Ukraine? How did it develop, what are its various forces, and how influential are they in the political system and the military?

This is a very important and, frankly, scary question. Because the truth is that politics in Ukraine is on a knife edge, and it could go to the right, not just the left. While I agree with you that the right's role and importance

has been exaggerated, it is also a real factor and threat.

It has, of course, been exaggerated by the separatists, Putin, and their strange supporters in the West. They have pointed to people wearing Nazi symbols and paint Ukraine as a government and nation of fascists, or at least ruled by them. This is completely untrue. Support for rightwing parties has declined dramatically.

And the truth is that the majority of people even inside the Azov Battalion do not realize the Nazi associations of the symbols they are wearing. They don't know the history of Stepan Bandera; they see him as a some who fought for Ukraine's freedom. But some are very aware of this Nazi past and are fascists, especially in leadership of some of the rightwing parties and the Azov Battalion. That makes me deeply concerned about them as a threat.

So, it would be a mistake to dismiss the threat of the right. The rightwing parties are small but significant force, and so is the Azov Battalion, even if it is a small portion of the overall military. Azov is quite strong. It runs the summer camps to recruit people into their ranks. And it can gain support as their forces are being hailed as heroes of the war in defending Mariupol.

These rightwing forces represent a threat to the future of a multiethnic Ukraine. They have pushed for terrible language laws that discriminate against Russian speakers. Not only are these wrong, but they will also feed the narrative of the Russian separatists.

Of course, Ukraine needs to decolonize and de-Russify. Russian remains the primary language for the most part. And, just to be clear, Russian speakers are not in general oppressed. But Ukrainian speakers have been.

For example, when I went to school, I was bullied for speaking Ukrainian. But the solution is not to mimic the colonizer in the process of decolonization and repress Russian and Russian speakers. There must be

equal language rights, not new forms of discrimination. This will be an urgent question in the process of rebuilding the country.

I am for the victory of Ukraine in restoring its borders and ending the Russian occupation. But that will open up a whole process of reconciliation of the cultural conflict that the oligarchs and their politicians manufactured and weaponized. This will be challenging because Russia's invasion has stirred up a healthy degree of Ukrainian nationalism, especially when Putin's pretext for the war was that your country was not even a country. We have to prevent that turning into xenophobia and ethno-nationalism.

We will have to transcend the desire to dig through history and refurbish old and problematic symbols in an effort to prove we're a nation. Instead, we need to seize the historic opportunity to reconstruct Ukraine as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country in which all minorities have equal rights to their language, schooling, and culture.

That is the task of the left and working-class organizations, and it will entail challenging the rule of the oligarch, their politicians, and the right. The politics of solidarity must triumph; otherwise we risk confirming Putin's obscene lie that we are a nation of bigots and fascists.

That raises the question of what the outcome of the war will be. It seems that Putin has been forced to retreat from his aim of regime change, now trying to lay waste to the western part of Ukraine and partitioning the country, securing control of Donbas as a land bridge to Crimea. What impact will that have on Ukraine, the resistance, and the political economy of the country?

If you asked me this question just three weeks ago, I would have said that if Putin agreed to retreat and just hold onto these so-called Republics, Ukrainians might accept it. But now, after the horrors of this war, the destruction of Kharkiv and Mariupol, the horrors from the outskirts of Kyiv, and the enormous number of lives lost, brutalized, and people displaced,

Ukrainians will not compromise.

The Ukrainian people have tried everything to put an end to this nightmare. We tried peace talks through the Minsk process. We held to a ceasefire even under fire in order to deny Putin the excuse to launch a war. None of it worked. The so-called peace process ended up paving the way for Putin to invade the country in a completely unprovoked attack. They have been planning this for years, blackmailing people, lying about events, and sending thousands of sleeper agents to infiltrate the country, identify targets, and plant radio signals on them.

Now we have thousands dead, millions displaced, and hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure destroyed. After all of this, few will agree to surrender whole parts of the country to the invaders. Ukrainians are realizing that if we do not win this war, there will be no Ukraine. If there are occupied parts of the country, there will be an insurgency against Russian forces who will be plotting another war. There will be no peace.

Putin does not recognize Ukraine's right to exist independently and so we have to fight back. We will not accept the partition of the country into something like North and South Korea. That means a long fight, but people will carry it out.

There is a lot up in the air right now. The outcome depends on if we are able to secure arms to defend ourselves and reclaim our country, if we're able to stick to our demands in these so-called negotiations, and if the Russian regime collapses. But we will not settle for anything less than the reunification and independence of Ukraine.

There is a significant debate in the international left about what position to take on the war and what demands to raise. What do you argue we should do?

Again, the international left must put its decolonial hat on in thinking about Ukraine. We are fighting Russia, our historic imperial oppressor. We've been politically, economically, culturally, and linguistically

dominated and colonized for a very long time.

I think some people still get their vision clouded by a one-dimensional opposition to US imperialism alone. But the US is not the aggressor in this situation. Russia is. Of course, NATO is a factor, but not the determinant one. Should NATO exist? Of course not. It should have been disbanded a long time ago. We all agree on that.

Let's focus on the central issue: Russian imperialism and the Ukrainian liberation struggle. Putin's made it very clear for years that he doesn't recognize Ukraine as a separate entity, claiming in his recent statement that country was created by the Bolsheviks. He wants to reclaim Ukraine, subject it to Russian rule, and has been pursuing that militarily since 2014, carrying out a completely unlawful, fabricated, violent partition of the country.

The international left must be in solidarity with Ukraine as an oppressed nation and our fight for self-determination. That includes our right to secure arms for our fighters and volunteers to win our freedom.

But the left must not support calls for closing the skies, essentially a demand for a NATO-imposed no fly zone. That would mean an air war between US and European fighters and Russian ones, risking a wider war between nuclear powers. Just look at what US interventions have done in other parts of the world like Iraq and Afghanistan.

The US and NATO fighters would not care about the damage their air war would cause in Ukraine. They would order us to evacuate the cities so that they can carry out a full scale military assault on Russian forces, furthering wrecking our country and inevitably killing more Ukrainians in the process.

In the aftermath, we will need some kind of peacekeeping force, perhaps UN peacekeepers. But that is difficult, as the UN is a fundamentally undemocratic organization with powers including Russia on the Security Council that can veto such a force. But we will need some international forces subject to some

sort of oversight to prevent more conflict. A new international security order will need to be built, with automatic suspension of aggressors,

no vetoes, no permanent members of a security council, with real mutual guarantees so that future suffering

can be prevented in a demilitarized world.

Source [Spectre](#).

Railway sabotage in Belarus: railway workers in action

12 April 2022, by **Patrick Le Tréhondat**

A trade union statement should never be taken lightly. Especially in times of war. Russian military logistics and the Belarusian railway management were to learn this the hard way. According to the human rights centre Viasna, eight Belarusian railway workers were arrested at the beginning of the war for sabotage against a Russian military railway transport.

A few days later, on 2 March, 43-year-old Alyaksei Shyshkavets, a resident of Asipovichy (a major railway junction), was arrested. According to the Ministry of the Interior, he was preparing to carry out acts of sabotage to prevent the movement of certain trains. Two other people were also arrested in Staubtsy on the night of 1 to 2 March. Another "saboteur" was reportedly arrested in Zhodzina on 2 March. At the beginning of March, railway workers reported that rail transport of Russian military equipment and ammunition had stopped crossing Belarus because of the numerous sabotages. In view of the scale of the phenomenon, the Russian agency TASS announced that the Belarusian Prosecutor General had opened a criminal investigation into what it called "acts of terrorism perpetrated by an organised group against the Belarusian railway infrastructure". He acknowledged that signalling facilities and other transport equipment had been rendered "unusable". The arrested railway workers face up to fifteen years in prison. Despite the threats, the sabotage continues.

On 6 March, Siarhei Kanavalau, a Belarusian railway employee, was

arrested in Vitsebsk. According to the Ministry of the Interior, he had planned to disable the railway security systems. In Svetlahorsk, a railway signalling unit is set on fire. The police accused three Svetlahorsk residents of this damage. Since then, dozens of acts of railway sabotage have been committed. This is evidenced by the videos posted on a pro-Russian Telegram channel (TG) in which 38 railway workers admit, in a staging worthy of the Moscow trials, to having committed acts of sabotage and being under foreign influence [see photo below].

On 19 March, the newspaper *Novy Chas* reported on twelve railway sabotages that paralysed the rail network, preventing wagons carrying Russian military equipment from reaching the Ukrainian border. On the night of 16 March, on the Farinovo-Zagattya section, the alarm relay box was set on fire.

On 20 March, Oleksandr Kamyshin [who lives semi-clandestinely because he is wanted by the Russian army: see *Ouest France*, 20 March 2022], chairman of the board of directors of Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railways), announced that there was no longer a rail link between Ukraine and Belarus. He thanked the Belarusian railway workers for their quick response to the war. "I recently called on the Belarusian railways not to carry out the criminal orders of their president and to refuse to transport Russian military personnel to Ukraine. Today I am pleased to announce that there is no rail link between Ukraine and Belarus. I won't go into details, but I

am very grateful to the Belarusian railways for their quick reaction,' he adds wryly.

On 25 March, rail links with Belarus were still suspended. The information was given in a Facebook post by Vitaly Koval, the Ukrainian governor of the Rivne region (north-west Ukraine). In this message published on social networks, Vitaly Koval called it "important news" for the Ukrainian people and expressed his gratitude to railway workers for their efforts and concluded: "My friends, the railway connection with the Republic of Belarus has stopped. This means that Russia will no longer be able to supply military equipment and supplies to the occupiers via the Belarusian railway. For more than a month, sabotage has been going on and Russian military rail transport has been largely impeded.

Faced with these unexpected "difficulties", Belarusian railways may be subjected to a large-scale "purge", in which "unreliable employees" are dismissed, says a Belarusian railway workers' encrypted channel. Troops of special units are stationed along railway lines. Some of these armed patrols are said to be in civilian clothes, equipped with walkie-talkies and GPS trackers. They reportedly set up their tents near the tracks.

On 30 March, a squad of these soldiers opened fire on a group of railway workers-partisans in action. The shots were heard near the Babina stop in the Babruisk district (Asipovichy-Zhlobin section). The partisans had opened two relay

cabinets (necessary for railway signalling). They managed to set one of them on fire. Until a group of soldiers who were in the woods and were supposed to guard the equipment opened fire. However, the partisans managed to escape.

According to the Belarusian website *Zerkalo* (30 March), at least 40 railway workers are in the hands of the Belarusian KGB. In addition, four other railway workers, including a train driver, are being held in Gomel, at least one of whom has been placed in the KGB's temporary detention

centre. All were reportedly subscribers to the encrypted channel "Community of Belarusian Railway Workers", which is denounced as an extremist group.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **l'Anticapitaliste**.*

Workers' Struggle to Organize Amazon Faces Challenges

11 April 2022, by Dan La Botz

While labor lawyers say this challenge seems unlikely to win, it will slow down the process of the union winning a first contract for these workers. It typically takes a union three years to win a first contract.

At another NLRB election held at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama at the same time, 993 workers voted against a different union there, while 875 vote in favor, but over 400 ballots have been contested and there is no final tally yet. It will be several weeks before a labor board hearing leads to a final decision on the union there.

These two elections make it clear that Amazon will use all of its wealth and power to fight unionization. Amazon spent \$4.2 million to stop the workers' Amazon Labor Union at Staten Island. The company fired some rank-and-file union organizers and had others arrested for trespassing, now its lawyers work to overturn the election.

At the same time, workers have suggested that they will expand the fight to other workplaces. Chris Smalls, the leader of the Staten Island effort, said that he had been contacted by people from fifty other Amazon workplaces, most of them in the United States but others in South Africa, India, Canada, and the U.K. In

a public radio interview he said, "We, as workers, the working class, have got to realize our value. If we don't go to work, these CEOs don't make their money. So, if workers can realize that no matter where you work in this country, what you're doing, then you can form a group that can collectively bargain.

That's what I think we witnessed on April 1st — we were able to share this experience with the world and let everybody know that any ordinary person can take down the most powerful company or retailer, or whatever, no matter how big or small."

Media of all sorts has been flooded with interviews with Smalls and other activists and accounts of their organizing: worker-led and based on hundreds of conversations with other workers in the plant, discussions held around barrels of burning wood at bus stops. While other unions spent large sums on salaries for professional organizers who had never worked at Amazon, relied on public relations, and brought in politicians unknown to the workers, the Staten Island experience was based entirely on the workers' themselves. This has sparked a national conversation about how unions should organize. Such grassroots activism represents both a

new possibility and a threat to existing unions, highly bureaucratic, legalistic, and largely ineffective.

The recent victory in New York also raises other questions. Organizers of the Staten Island facility never called upon workers in the plant to take any direct action against the company. While workers reportedly did disrupt the company's captive-audience meetings, there were no slowdowns and no work stoppages. Workers relied entirely on the government supervised vote.

As workers fight to defend their victory at Staten Island, to organize at other plants, and then to win labor union contracts, the history of the labor movement suggests that they will have to be prepared to use their power to be successful. When workers do use their power in large strikes, the experience can rapidly become contagious and spread throughout the working class. This has happened throughout history: France, the United States, and Mexico in the 1930s, Poland, Brazil, South Korea, and South Africa in the 1980s, in Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab Spring, and more recently in Algeria and Sudan. Can it happen in the United States today?

10 April 2022

Turkish diplomacy, Nato and the left

10 April 2022, by **Uraz Aydin**

First with the Antalya Diplomatic Forum of 10 March, in which the foreign ministers of the two countries participated, and then, last week, by welcoming the Russian and Ukrainian delegations to Istanbul, the Turkish president was able to take advantage of the "opportunity" offered by this war to restore his image at the international level.

A sinuous foreign policy

Indeed, Ankara, a member of NATO since 1952 and with the second largest army in its midst, has followed an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy in recent years, which wanted to be "independent" in its international relations, especially vis-à-vis the Western imperialist powers. The main breaking point was the military rapprochement with Russia through Ankara's acquisition of the Russian S400 air defence system in 2017-2018 (incompatible with Nato systems). This foreign policy shift had been initiated after the 2016 coup attempt - deemed to be supported by the US - and Washington's alliance with Kurdish forces in northern Syria in the fight against the Islamic State.

After several years of multilateral tensions - with almost all his neighbours and the major Western powers - and military interventions outside his borders (in Syria and

Libya), Erdogan, facing a deep economic crisis and popular discontent (65 wildcat strikes in the first two months of 2022), has been trying for several months to reposition himself internationally. Without breaking with Moscow (on which it is dependent for energy), Ankara is trying to get closer to the Western bloc and, at the same time, to reconcile with the Arab Emirates and Israel in order to get out of its isolation and recover its economy.

In this context, Russia's invasion of Ukraine offers Erdogan the opportunity to show his balancing act and make his diplomatic turn. The fact that Ankara has economic and military relations with both countries is to its advantage and it has everything to gain if the war does not take a "global" turn with the involvement of Nato, which would force it to clarify its positions and act with the latter.

Rejection of the "imperialist war"

However, while the Russian invasion is certainly not accepted and is not perceived as legitimate in society, there has been no massive demonstration of solidarity with the Ukrainian people or even more vaguely an anti-war mobilization that would gather several thousand people. However, much smaller demonstrations have been organized

by the radical left in several cities. The Russian invasion being of course denounced, it is the rejection of an "imperialist war" between Russia and Nato, to the detriment of the peoples - and in particular the Ukrainian people - that stands out in these statements, one of whose main demands is the withdrawal of Turkey from Nato.

Let's remember that NATO was at the origin in Turkey of the formation of a "special operations" department within the state from the 1950s onwards, in connection with the far-right militias, active in the repression of the left and the workers' movement for several decades. So Nato is not only a question of international imperialist alignment for the left in Turkey, but is above all about the memory of many local massacres and murders. The question of whether or not to support arms deliveries by Nato states to Ukraine is thus completely absent from the strategic debate, while for example a halt to the sale of Bayraktar TB2 drones - apparently effective in combat - to the Ukrainian state could be demanded even if this demand was not generally accepted.

While the bulk of the radical left cannot be called "Putinist", it is clear that not being on the same side as Western imperialism and its military arm remains an imperative in its positions.

7 April 2022
Istanbul

Against Russian Imperialism

9 April 2022, by **Russian Socialist Movement (RSD),**

Sotsialnyi Rukh

Although the majority of the left has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the left camp's unity is still lacking. We would like to address those on the left who still stick to "a plague on both houses" position that views the war as an inter-imperialist war.

It is high time the left woke up and carried out a "concrete analysis of the concrete situation" instead of reproducing worn-out frameworks from the Cold War. Overlooking Russian imperialism is a terrible mistake for the left. It is Putin, not NATO, who is waging war on Ukraine. That is why it is essential to shift our focus from Western imperialism to Putin's aggressive imperialism, which has an ideological and political basis in addition to an economic one.

Russian imperialism consists of two elements. Firstly, it involves revisionist Russian nationalism. After 2012, Putin and his establishment moved from a civic concept of the nation (as *rossiysky*, "related to Russia") to an exclusive, ethnically based concept of Russianness (as *russskiy*, "ethnically/culturally Russian"). His aggression in 2014 and in 2022 was legitimized by the return of "originally" Russian lands. Moreover, this concept of (ethnic) "Russianness" revives the nineteenth-century imperial concept of the Russian nation, which reduces Ukrainian and Belarusian identity to regional identities. According to this view, Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians are a single people. Employing this concept in official rhetoric implies the negation of independent Ukrainian statehood. That is why we cannot say with any degree of certainty that Putin only wants the recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea and the Donbas. Putin may desire to either annex or subdue the whole of Ukraine, threats which appear in his article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" and in his speech on February 21, 2022. Finally, the perspective of Ukraine-Russia peace

talks look rather bleak, as Russia's negotiation team is headed by former Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, one of the most dedicated believers in the ideology of *russskiy mir* (the ethnic Russian world) – a world where, believe us, no one will be happy.

Secondly, even though Putin's aggression is hard to explain rationally, current events have demonstrated that it may be reasonable enough, nevertheless, to take Russian imperialist rhetoric at face value. Russian imperialism is fueled by the desire to change the so-called "world order." Thus, Putin's demand for NATO's withdrawal from Eastern Europe may signal that Russia may not stop with Ukraine, and Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia may be the next targets of Putin's aggression. It is very naïve to demand to demilitarize Eastern Europe, because in the light of current circumstances, that will only be appeasing Putin and will make Eastern European countries vulnerable to Putin's aggression. Discourse about NATO expansion obscures Putin's desire to divide the spheres of influence in Europe between the US and Russia. Being in the Russian sphere of influence means a country's political subordination to Russia and subjection to the expansion of Russian capital. The cases of Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate that Putin is ready to use force to influence the political affairs of countries which he believes wish to leave the Russian sphere of influence. It is important to understand that Putin's understanding of key agents in the world order is basically limited to the US and China. He does not recognize other countries' sovereignty, regarding them as satellites of one of these agents of the international order.

Putin and his establishment are very cynical. They use the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, American intervention in Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq as a shield for the bombing of Ukraine. In this context, the left must

show consistency and say no to all imperialist aggression in the world. Today the imperialist aggressor is Russia, not NATO, and if Russia is not stopped in Ukraine, it will definitely continue its aggression.

Furthermore, we must have no illusions about Putin's regime. It offers no alternative to Western capitalism. It is an authoritarian, oligarchic capitalism. The level of inequality in Russia has risen significantly during the 20 years of his leadership. Putin is not only an enemy of the working class, but also an enemy to all forms of democracy. Popular participation in politics and voluntary associations is treated with suspicion in Russia. Putin is essentially an anti-Communist and an enemy to everything the left fought for in the twentieth century and is fighting for in the twenty-first. In his worldview, the strong have a right to beat the weak, the rich have the right to exploit the poor, and strongmen in power have the right to make decisions on behalf of their disempowered population. This worldview must be dealt a severe blow in Ukraine. In order for political change to come about inside of Russia, the Russian army must be defeated in Ukraine.

We want to address a highly controversial demand, that of military aid to Ukraine. We understand the repercussions of militarization for the progressive left movement worldwide and the left's resistance to NATO expansion or Western intervention. However, more context is needed to provide a fuller picture. First of all, NATO countries provided weapons to Russia despite the 2014 embargo (France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia, and Spain). Thus, the discussion about whether weapons sent to the region end up in the right or wrong hands sounds a bit belated. They are already in bad hands, and EU countries would only be righting their earlier wrongs by providing weapons to Ukraine. Moreover, the alternative security guarantees that the Ukrainian

government has proposed require the involvement of a number of countries, and probably can be achieved only with their involvement, too. Secondly, as numerous articles have emphasized, the Azov regiment is a problem. However, unlike in 2014, the far right is not playing a prominent role in today's war, which has become a people's war – and our comrades on the anti-authoritarian left of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus are fighting together against imperialism. As has become clear in the last few days, Russia is trying to compensate for its failure on the ground with air attacks. Air defense will not give Azov any additional power, but it will help Ukraine keep control of its territory and reduce civilian deaths even if negotiations fail.

In our opinion, the Left should demand:

- the immediate withdrawal of all Russian armed forces from Ukraine
- new targeted, personal sanctions on Putin and his multimillionaires. (It is important to understand that Putin and his establishment care only about their own

private assets; they are oblivious to the state of the Russian economy overall. The left can also use this demand to expose the hypocrisy of those who sponsored Putin's regime and army and even now continue selling weapons to Russia)

- the sanctioning of Russian oil and gas
- increased military support to Ukraine, in particular the provision of air defense systems
- the introduction of UN peacekeepers from non-NATO countries to protect civilians, including the protection of green corridors and the protection of nuclear power plants (Russia's veto in the UN Security Council can be overcome at the General Assembly)

The left should also support those Ukrainian leftists who are resisting,

giving them visibility, centering their voices, and supporting them financially. We recognize that it is the millions of Ukrainian essential workers and humanitarian aid volunteers who make further resistance possible.

A number of other demands – support for all refugees in Europe regardless of citizenship, the cancellation of Ukraine's foreign debt, sanctions against Russian oligarchs, etc. – are broadly accepted on the left and, therefore, we do not discuss them here.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine sets a terrible precedent for the resolution of conflicts which involve the risk of nuclear war. This is why the Left must come up with our own vision of international relations and the architecture of international security which may include multilateral nuclear disarmament (which will be binding for all nuclear powers) and the institutionalization of international economic responses to any imperialist aggression in the world. The military defeat of Russia should be the first step towards the democratization of the global order and the formations of an international security system, and the international left must make a contribution to this cause.

Source: [Left East](#).

Ukrainian socialist: 'The future of demilitarisation lies in stopping Russia's war machine now'

8 April 2022, by **Federico Fuentes, Vitaliy Dudin**

It is very difficult to get a real picture of what is happening in Ukraine. Could we start with your assessment of the current state of play six weeks into Putin's invasion? Do you see any likely prospect for an end to the war in the coming weeks?

Russia's invasion has created a major threat to the existence of Ukraine as an independent state. Without doubt, we can say that the current war is the most devastating war we have seen [in Ukraine] since World War II.

Several regions — Chernigiv, Donetsk,

Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Sumy and Zaporizhia — have been converted into theatres of military actions, with tanks and artillery shelling cities. The Russian army has even attacked cities in western Ukraine, in the Lviv, Rivne and Volyn regions, firing deadly missiles from

the air and sea.

About 6000 civilians have been killed. Military actions have taken the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers from both sides. About 5 million people have lost their jobs, mainly because so many workplaces have been bombed. Nearly 10 million people have been forced to flee for safety and hundreds of thousands have lost their homes.

Many towns in the north, east and south are currently, or were until recently, under brutal Russian occupation. But the invaders have not managed to achieve their strategic aims.

They have only occupied one big city — Kherson — and are trying to assault Mariupol, which is undergoing an inhumane blockade and bombing campaign. Almost every building in the city has been damaged, including medical infrastructure.

Russian troops have been halted in the majority of directions, and have suffered significant losses in terms of personnel and vehicles. Ukrainians have shown that they are willing to bravely fight back, even without modern weapons such as anti-aircraft systems, fighter jets and missiles.

That is why I believe that the Russian army lacks the strength to crush the Ukrainian army, and why military actions might be halted, at least in some regions. Putin's government has a lot of resources, but Ukrainian people are willing and ready to resist.

At the moment, the Ukrainian army is pushing back the invaders in several directions, mostly in the Kyiv and Cherniv regions. Towns such as Ivankiv, Bucha and Hostomel, which were occupied and plundered in the first weeks of war, have been liberated.

But we shouldn't underestimate the danger: the Russian invasion has caused vast destruction, their missile attacks continue to cause large-scale destruction and they have reinvigorated the offensive in Donbas.

I think that the war will continue as long as [Russian President Vladimir] Putin is in power. Until his demise, for now we can only envisage a partial

cease-fire. The destiny of Ukraine depends on the battle for Mariupol.

Could you give us an idea of the kinds of resistance — armed and unarmed — that Ukrainians are engaging in. What role is the left, such as Social Movement, and trade unions playing within the resistance?

Firstly, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have joined the Armed Forces (AF) of Ukraine and the Territorial Defence (TD), which is integrated into the AF. The AF is currently fighting on the frontline with all the weapons available to it, whereas the TD mostly protects cities with guns.

Some Social Movement activists, as well as many trade union members, have joined the TD as volunteers. It is worth mentioning that dozens of anarchists and socialists have formed their own unit within the TD, called the Resistance Committee.

Secondly, a lot of leftists are helping as volunteers to supply the army or satisfy people's humanitarian needs. One of the most effective initiatives in this regard is Operation Solidarity, which has managed to provide supplies to the militant left. We are also working to meet the needs of trade union members serving in the army.

We have also worked with the nurses' NGO Be Like Nina and helped them obtain medicines for hospitals that are taking care of wounded soldiers.

Third, we see that a lot of people are protesting the invaders in occupied cities. We aren't involved in such activity, but we support it. Of course, it is very dangerous because peaceful protests can be shot down by armed Russian soldiers. Such resistance proves that people are against the "liberation" that seeks to turn their cities into grey-zones.

Fourth, we as Social Movement continue to act as a political organisation. We seek to counter Russian propaganda and call on our people to fight for a free and fair Ukraine.

A lot of attention has been given to

the Azov battalion and other neo-Nazi forces. Could you tell us about their real level of influence and the role they play? Are you concerned that the far right — in Ukraine and abroad — will come out stronger from this war, particularly the longer it drags on?

I think that the role of the far-right has been overestimated. This has been shown up in the phantasmagorical way that Russia tried to justify its invasion and war crimes.

Before February 24, Azov united about 1000 people who were located in Mariupol and did nothing, because they were integrated into the National Guard of Ukraine. After the Russian invasion, they have been heroised due to their role in the defence of Mariupol, alongside AF units. This is a strange way to dismantle a far-right nationalist agenda, isn't it?

Far-right militants have committed acts of violence on the streets, but can these actions be in any way compared to the mass killings that have resulted from the bombing and terror campaign carried out during the occupation?

Of course, they could become stronger, but if this occurs it would be the fault of Russia.

Radical nationalists exist in Ukraine, in their specific niche, as in many other countries. Their activities pose a problem for Ukrainian society, but not for Russia or international peace.

The far right in Ukraine was mainly tolerated because of the defence needs of the Ukrainian state. The government turned a blind eye to attacks by radical nationalists while they helped them meet their defence needs.

These radical nationalists have played a role in protecting and serving the oligarchic elite and its regime. But their political influence is very small and they mostly have a very limited role.

For now, the radical nationalists are playing a less important role than in the 2014 Maidan protests, because thousands of ordinary people are taking up arms. The more Ukrainians

that have the necessary weapons to defend themselves — and the more the international left supports Ukraine — the less influence the far right will have in Ukraine.

The best way to neutralise the problem of radical nationalism in Ukraine is by weakening Russia's imperialist intentions. Those who refuse to express solidarity with Ukraine because of the existence of radical nationalists have nothing in common with anti-war principles and ideas.

Much has been made about the conflict in eastern Ukraine prior to the invasion. How has the invasion impacted on this conflict and, more generally, on relations between Ukrainian and Russian speakers in Ukraine?

Putin's invasion has seriously damaged relations between Russian and Ukrainian people but, at the same time, it has brought about some kind of consolidation in Ukrainian society. After February 24, even people who had some political illusions regarding Russia's progressive role became convinced enemies of Moscow.

We can say that this common tragedy has united people. People from the western part of Ukraine are willing to help refugees from the east and are showing their support.

At the same time, some people have pursued an exclusionary and extremist agenda, claiming that Russian speaking people are "agents of Putin". We know that Russian culture will be associated with the culture of the oppressors for a long time (until Putin's regime is overthrown by Russian citizens). But we are ready to oppose any sort of linguistic or cultural discrimination and hope that solidarity will prevail.

We have also seen that ordinary people in the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas are tired of being used by Moscow in the war against Ukrainians. Of course, most of them consider Russian as their native language, but they do not wish to give up their lives either. Even amid this horrible story, the potential for re-integration remains.

Given where things are at, some believe that the best possible outcome is for Ukraine to negotiate and give up its ambitions to join NATO. How would you respond to those who argue this? More broadly, how do Social Movement view the issue of NATO and its role in this war?

First of all, we think that any intention of joining NATO cannot justify Russian invasion. This is an issue that lies in the field of domestic debate and national sovereignty.

Second, we view NATO as a club of the richest countries and their close allies. For Ukraine, it would be better to develop relations with all countries and ensure real independence.

Third, it is important to realise how the issue of NATO has impacted Ukrainian political life. The perspective of membership was very vague — NATO has never guaranteed membership for Ukraine. So an "Atlantic orientation" was always more a case of wishful thinking on the part of the government, while for the people it was a reaction to the collective trauma and fear of war in 2014.

NATO could have offered Ukraine membership a long time ago, but instead it promised some kind of cooperation, which only made Ukraine vulnerable. We believe NATO has played the role of a passive spectator in this war. Starting from the end of 2021, they have done nothing to support Ukraine with arms. It seems as if they are more interested in assessing the strength of the Russian army.

Debates have occurred over the issue of sending weapons to Ukraine, with some opposing this saying it would only contribute to the re-militarisation of Europe and empowerment of NATO. Others say it will lead to a scenario like Afghanistan in the 1980s, with Ukrainians being used to obtain the US' goal of undermining Russia. What is Social Movement's position on this question?

I see no reason for such a debate. Talk of the risks of re-militarisation in

Europe is totally ill-grounded, because there is a complete asymmetry between Ukraine and Russia. The future of demilitarisation lies in stopping Russia's war machine now.

Issues of security should be of strong concern. Any demilitarisation that ignores the security of the people, their right to defend themselves, and justifies blocking resistance against imperialist aggression is morally wrong.

Ukraine needs weapons to defend itself and the rest of Europe. We need anti-aircraft weapons and jets to protect civilians, because people are dying from missiles and airstrikes.

I want to stress that such weapons will not change the nature of war: they won't enable Ukraine's army to eliminate enemies far away but rather enhance their fire-power in close combat.

The more Russian military units that are destroyed, the more stable a peace we will get. It is simple, like during the war against the Third Reich. Russia also justifies its aggression with an ideology of ethno-nationalism. It's a strong and real threat that needs to be addressed.

It is also important to know that a lot of Ukrainian workers are joining the army. We should arm them, so that they can return to their homes alive and be empowered to continue the class war against greedy oligarchs.

Beyond the question of arms, what kind of solidarity do you believe is required to ensure genuine peace for Ukraine?

We ask that everyone put pressure on their governments to ensure debt cancellation and provide unconditional financial aid for rebuilding Ukraine, as part of a so-called "New Marshall Plan".

You can also help us by sending any type of aid (including medikits, bulletproof vests, helmets).

But the most specific thing leftists can do is to fundamentally shift their organisation's analysis of the war. They should not tolerate Putin's imperialism and should fully support

Imperial Legacy: Putin and Grand Russian Nationalism

7 April 2022, by **Denis Paillard**

Vladimir Putin's speech on Ukraine is part of this imperial heritage: the unity of Greater Russia was broken during the 1917 revolution. In his declaration of February 22, 2022 (two days preceding the invasion), he explains that Ukraine as a republic is a disastrous consequence of the policy followed by Lenin after the 1917 revolution:

"So let me start with the fact that modern Ukraine was created entirely by Russia, or more precisely, by Bolshevik and communist Russia. The process began almost immediately after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his comrades in arms did it in a very crude way to Russia itself – through secession, tearing away parts of its own historic territories. [...] "From the point of view of the historical destiny of Russia and its people, the Leninist principles of state building were not only a mistake: they were, as we say, even worse than an error".

This declaration echoes a long text (50,000 characters) published on the government website in July 2021, which defines Putin's position. In this text it is said that Ukrainians and Russians are one and the same people. And in conclusion he writes: "I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human and civilizational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties

that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people".

That the intervention in Ukraine was thought of in these terms is confirmed by the text published (then immediately withdrawn) on February 26 (two days after the invasion) on the site of the RIA Novosti Agency. Written in advance and anticipating a quick and total victory of the Russian forces, it clearly defines the real stakes:

"Russia is restoring its unity. Indeed, the tragedy of 1991, this terrible catastrophe of our history, this unnatural dislocation, is finally overcome [...] Russia is restored to its historical integrity, bringing together the Russian world, the Russian people: the Great Russians (Russians of the Russian Federation), Belarusians and Little Russians (Ukrainians). [...] Ukraine returned to Russia. This return does not mean that Ukraine loses its statehood. Simply, it will be transformed, reorganized and returned to its original state as an integral part of the Russian world. »

In other words, the invasion of Ukraine has the primary objective of bringing Ukraine back into the Russian fold, ending its relations with the EU and the United States, accused of using the Ukraine as a base for manoeuvres against Russia. But it is necessary to insist on the fact that this imperial/imperialist logic [36] of Putin's Russia is primary: the denunciation of the West and of NATO must be understood from this perspective.

The armed resistance of the Ukrainians during the first four weeks after the invasion destroyed the first illusion of a quick victory and the realization of the original plans. But that does not call into question the topicality of the initial project: to bring Ukraine back to Russia at all costs (and to date the price to be paid is already immense for the Ukrainians). Today it is difficult to predict what will happen next – a rather gloomy prospect: the heroic resistance of the Ukrainians alone will hardly be able to put an end to the Russian occupation.

To understand and define the issues of full and complete active solidarity with the Ukrainian people, it is crucial to start from this position: the war in Ukraine is a war of aggression waged by an imperial/imperialist power against a nation state, Ukraine, which is defending its freedom and independence. This fundamental perception tends to be partially concealed in favor of a representation in terms of confrontation between two camps: on the one hand, the West (EU + EU under the NATO hat), on the other Russia which proclaims loud and clear that its integrity is being attacked and threatened. The prolongation of the war can only feed and reinforce this campist view of the situation, to the detriment of the Ukrainian resistance and its struggle for its independence and sovereignty.

The current situation and the dramatic threats hanging over the Ukrainian people today are part of a long history in which the right of peoples to self-determination was only recognized for a (too) brief period, the day after the 1917 revolution, which put an end to the Tsarist Empire, a "prison of the

peoples". Very quickly, the great Russian vice would be reactivated, de facto denying the national rights recognized to the republics forming the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Lenin against Stalin

In Putin's various statements, Lenin is violently attacked for having questioned a unitary state. Stalin is presented as the one who defended a unitary position in accordance with the historical interests of Russia. Although in the end Stalin backed down and adopted the theses defended by Lenin, in fact, as Moshe Lewin wrote in *Lenin's Last Struggle* : "He (Stalin) was persuaded that the course of events, the real interests of the state would take precedence over it and that the Union would work anyway as he had planned. Under these conditions, he saw no harm in yielding completely to Lenin on paper".

The period of recognition of the rights of nationalities [37] was indeed short-lived in the 1920s. With the arrival of Stalin in power, autocracy and Grand Russian nationalism regained the upper hand. Below, without claiming to be exhaustive, we go over different moments.

The 1930s: return to autocracy

In his text "Ego and politics in the Stalinist autocracy" (in *Russie/URSS/Russie* , Page 2, Syllepse) Moshe Lewin writes: "Stalin always tended to make the glory of the Tsarist imperial past his own and to use tradition for the benefit of his system [...] Stalin's emphasizing of his regime's affinities with the Empire and claiming common historical roots, especially regarding the construction of the state by the cruellest of tsars, made possible a radical redefinition of his own character, but also of the ideological and political identity of the system". . Recalling that Lenin had called Stalin a *derzhimorda* ("great Russian bully"), Moshe Lewin writes

that Stalin "ended up by actually wanting to be a great Russian bully" [38].

Great Patriotic War

During the war, different minorities were deported between 1941 and 1944: the Volga Germans, the Kalmouks, the Balkars, the Karatchais, the Ingush, the Crimean Tatars.

The Last Years of Stalin and Zhdanovism

In *The Soviet Century* , Moshe Lewin evokes Zhdanovism (1946-1950) which constitutes a particularly dark chapter in the history of Stalinism: "An expression of Russian ultranationalism, Zhdanovism attacked manifestations of nationalism in the non- Russians" (p. 130). "The ideology of Zhdanovism was Stalin's own, of course - the culmination of his ideological peregrinations. Stalin was by now fascinated by the 'glorious' Tsarist past. [...] Worse than the external paraphernalia is the extreme Russian nationalism, savouring of proto-fascism , typical of decaying Stalinism. Stalin wanted this spirit to survive him. To this end, he personally revised the Soviet anthem, imposing on a multi-national country a chauvinist paeon to 'Great Russia' " p. 173. On this issue, see also ibidem, p. 147-149. [39]

The state and party bureaucracy was fragmented, a set of factions, cliques and networks within the various instances of power, coming together in a series of more or less lasting alliances, on the basis of common interests and more or less shared ideological positions. These different components of the bureaucracy had in common the celebration of the USSR (actually Russia) as a *derzhava* ("strong state"). Any reference to the October Revolution was erased, it was the "Great Patriotic War" (the Second World War) which was the reference. We can witness there the strengthening of the policy of

assimilation of non-Russian nationalities. Brezhnev was distinguished by the intensification of Russification under the flag of the creation of a single Soviet people. From 1976 the main slogan of Russification was the celebration of the "Russian language, language of progress, socialism and internationalism" [40].

Nikolai Mitrokhin's book [41] *Russkaja partija : dvizhenie russkikh nacionalistov v SSSR 1953-1985* ("The Russian party: the movement of Russian nationalists in the USSR 1953-1985), shows that great Russian nationalism was present in all the leading instances of the CPSU: Politburo, Central Committee of the CPSU, but also of the Komsomol: virulent anti-Westernism , admiration for Stalin presented as the builder of a strong state, celebration of the Great Patriotic War, reinforcement of military education and militarization of youth, glorification of Greater Russia. All the components of Putin's discourse today were already present [42].

The end of the USSR and the 1990s: a Russia by default

December 21, 1991 marks the end of the USSR, with the creation of independent republics whose leaders came directly from the previous period, with the exception of the Baltic countries. Within this framework, the Federative Republic of Russia was created. The de facto Russia/USSR confusion throughout the Soviet period with regard to the governing bodies resulted in the absence of properly Russian institutions. In particular, there was no Communist Party of Russia, a party which would be created urgently.

The Russian Federation designated a Russia by default: a vague and suspended identity corresponding to what remained of the USSR after the independence of the republics [43].

On the economic level, we were witnessing a collapse of the system,

with a policy of "reforms" carried out at full speed: massive de-industrialization, wildcat privatization of all the country's wealth ("the biggest hold-up of the century" according to Moshe Lewin), a brutal fall in the standard of living, a demographic crisis. The policy pursued by Yeltsin was that of *laissez-faire*, pursued by the reforming liberals in direct association with the IMF and the World Bank.

Faced with this, we witnessed an explosion of Russian nationalism, of which the new Communist Party of the Russian Federation was one of the main actors. Its first secretary, Gennadi Ziuganov, was the spokesperson for this virulent nationalism: one of his brochures was entitled *I am Russian by heart and by blood* , another was entitled *Derzhava* ("Great power"). And on different occasions, he criticized Lenin: "It seems to me that Lenin was subjected to strong pressure and influence from forces that hated Russia" (we are not far from the thesis presenting the October 1917 revolution as a Judeo-Bolshevik plot) [44].

Putin's Russia:

Rebuilding Greater Russia

Having come to power at the time of the Second Chechen War, Putin very quickly embarked on a series of operations aimed at reducing the gap between the Russian Federation born from the collapse of the Soviet Empire (regularly assimilated to a second major catastrophe hitting Russia - the first being the 1917 revolution) and historical Greater Russia. This was reflected both domestically: authoritarianism and a strong state, muscular patriotism, denunciation of the "degenerate" West and sworn enemy of Russia; and externally, through interventions in the "near abroad". that is to say the republics that emerged after the end of the USSR.

Russia intervened during the various "colour revolutions" assimilated to an attempt to leave its sphere of influence: the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004. But also , more recently during the conflict

between Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as in Kazakhstan. This enterprise took the form of the attachment to Russia of territories of Georgia such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia (in 2008). But it was vis-à-vis Ukraine that Putin's strategy would take the most radical and brutal form: unlike the other republics, Ukraine is for Putin an integral part of Greater Russia. - see his statements, quoted above, at the time of the armed intervention in Ukraine [45].

A first step was taken in 2014 at the time of Maidan with the annexation of Crimea and the appearance of the self-proclaimed republics of Lugansk and Donetsk. The invasion of Ukraine launched on February 24 is a new step. Everything shows that it is not a whim of an adventurist Putin, but that it is part of a project, largely theorized, of reconstituting Greater Russia.

Although the fierce resistance of the Ukrainians has slowed down the advance of the Russian troops, it is very difficult to predict the sequence of events. But there is no reason to think that Putin has given up on his plan to dismantle Ukraine.

Monday 4 April 2022

Russia and Ukraine: A Stalemate? A Turning Point?

6 April 2022, by **Dan La Botz, Patrick Silberstein**

Russian troops have retreated in a disorderly fashion, and they are heading to the east, where they will regroup, have an opportunity to rest, be replenished with new troops, and be resupplied with arms and equipment. They will also be joined by Wagner, the Russian pseudo-private army [46] as well as Libyan and Syrian troops and new recruits from Russia. [47]

The Russian retreat from the town around Kyiv and other regions has revealed not only the massive

destruction of aerial and artillery bombardment, but also what observers say are massacres of civilians and evidence of cases of rape of Ukrainian women who were then murdered. [48] The horror and revulsion at information about these atrocities has led to calls for investigations by international organizations from the United Nations to the European Union, as well as by several national political leaders and human rights groups. [49] It has also been accompanied by calls for more sanctions [50] and more military

equipment for Ukraine, so that such abuses also become a factor in the war. Despite all of these developments, the Russian war against Ukraine remains at an impasse, the central issues of this essay to which we now turn.

The Russian war against Ukraine, according to military experts and press reports, now appears after just a little more than one month to have reached an impasse. This is contrary to the expectations of many, such as General Mark Milley, who in early

February told U.S. legislators that if Russia invaded Ukraine, Kyiv would fall in 72-hours. [51] Ukraine has succeeded in thwarting Russia's plans.

How is it that Ukraine has been able to stop Russian imperialism's steamroller? [52] What does it mean that we now have a stalemate and how might such a stalemate end? While the political and economic measures taken by the United States, the European Union, and other nations, especially the economic sanctions on Russia, represent an important factor in the war, we concentrate here on the military issues. We hope to provide here information to allow those in the internationalist left to make their own assessment so that we can take the actions—financial and material aid, building support and building an anti-war movement—to help Ukraine win.

We turn now to Frederick W. Kagan who holds a degree from Yale in Russian and Eastern European Studies as well as in military history, has taught as a professor at the West Point Military Academy, a resident scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, and a neocon with expertise in military matters. Obviously, he also sometimes interpolates political advice to the ruling class with which we do not agree, but he and his colleagues at the Institute for the Study of War have insights into military affairs that are useful to those of us on the left. In an article a couple of weeks ago, Kagan wrote: "The initial Russian campaign to invade and conquer Ukraine is coming to an end without having achieved its objectives - in other words, it is being defeated." The war he wrote has become a "stalemate" whose outcome is unclear. [53] He continues:

The failure of Russia's initial campaign nevertheless marks an important shift that has implications for the development and execution of Western military, economic and political strategies. The West must continue to provide Ukraine with the weapons it needs to fight, but it must now also significantly expand its aid to help keep Ukraine alive as a country,

even under deadlock conditions.

Kagan suggests that we compare Putin's initial campaign against Ukraine with moment during World War I and with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, which also created a long period of impasse.

The stalemate describes a war situation in which neither side can radically change the front lines, no matter how hard it tries....The First World War embodied the impasse...gave rise to very hard fighting with many losses on both sides. The front lines became generally (but not completely) static, with very little movement. There was always a certain movement of lines....but never enough to materially change the situation. [54]

The impasse often involves heavy and bloody battles, such as Somme, Verdun, and Passchendaele in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed but the frontline did not move much. How can such a deadlock be broken? One side can lose its will, one side may gain a technological advantage, or a new ally may enter the war, as in the case of the United States during the First World War, or one side may simply collapse as happened to Russia in 1917. Many things can happen. "This is the most likely scenario we are currently seeing in Ukraine," writes Kagan.

Our assessment is that the Russian campaign has reached its climax, and that conditions of stalemate are emerging....the Russians do not [have] the ability to bring great effective combat power in a short period of time. The types of mobilizations in which the Russians engage will only generate new combat power in several months at the earliest. Unless something remarkable breaks the impasse we are currently in, the impasse is likely to last for months. Hence our assessment and forecasts.

And of course, we can be wrong. What could happen for this to be

the case? [55]

Kagan suggests that changing circumstances could lead to a Russian victory or even a Ukrainian victory, though that seems less likely.

How Is Ukraine Resisting?

Let's turn to Ukraine and how it is resisting the Russian invasion. First, Ukraine has mobilized its military. "Ukraine has one of Europe's largest militaries, with 170,000 active-duty troops, 100,000 reservists and territorial defense forces that include at least 100,000 veterans." [56] Many citizens have since the beginning of the Russian attack volunteered for these units of territorial defense. The Ukrainian government has begun drafting civilian men between 18 and 60 to join the war effort, forbidding them from leaving the country. In addition, the government has called for international volunteers to join the struggle which is both militarily and politically problematic. [57] In addition, some 500,000 Ukrainians, 70 to 80% of them men, have returned to the Ukraine, [58] many of them to fight the Russian invasion.

"On the battlefield, the Ukrainian military is conducting a hugely effective and mobile defense, using their knowledge of their home turf to stymie Russian forces on multiple fronts," said Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Milley said some of the tactics employed by Ukrainian troops included using mobile weapons systems to bedevil the Russians wherever they could. Ukraine's forces [he said] are "fighting with extraordinary skill and courage against Russian forces." [59] Using "guerrilla-style tactics" they proved able to hold off much larger and better armed Russian forces for weeks. [60]

A reporter writes, "Ukrainian forces have bogged down Russian units in cities and small towns; street-to-street fighting favors defenders who can use their superior knowledge of the city's geography to hide and ambush. They

attacked isolated and exposed Russian units moving on open roads, which are easy targets. They made repeated raids on poorly protected supply lines in an attempt to deprive the Russians of necessary supplies such as fuel.” [61] Western military officials say, “Hitting and ambushing Russian forces behind the contact lines with fast-moving units, often at night, has proven among its most effective field tactics and is adding to the logistical missteps the Russians still have not been able to overcome, military strategists say. They add that the tactics are also demoralizing Russian troops.” [62]

The Ukrainian army also claims the formation of a unit of Russian deserters fighting in its ranks, the “Freedom Legion of Russia”, with the participation of Belarusian fighters. A statement by a Russian officer was broadcast:

I appeal to the military personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, who are currently on the territory of Ukraine. [...] I will say only one thing: Russian officers are turning to you. On February 24, we [...] entered the territory of independent Ukraine, following the criminal orders of the dictator Putin. I realized that we obviously did not come here with good intentions and that no one was waiting for us here with flowers as if we were liberators, but on the contrary, they cursed us and called us fascists. Military comrades, following the order of the dictator Putin, we have made a terrible mistake. Most of you know this. On February 27 [...] my company and I switched to the side of Ukraine in order to really protect the people from the Nazis. [...] Join our ranks, become part of the Freedom Legion of Russia. Only together can we save Russia from humiliation and devastation. Only together will we save our people.

We have not been able to verify the existence of this Legion, though there are video interviews and texts on social media, but if true, for us

internationalists, it is a masterful lesson in revolutionary politics. [63]

The Russians have had considerable success in taking territory, says Michael Kofman, director of Russian studies at the CNA security think-tank. But, he adds, these advances were not necessarily the sole result of Russian battlefield supremacy. Ukraine, Kofman explains, made the tactical decision to trade “space for time”: to withdraw strategically rather than fight for every inch of Ukrainian land, fighting the Russians on the territory and at the time of their choosing.

As the fighting continued, the nature of the Ukrainian choice became clearer. Instead of getting into pitched large-scale battles with Russians on open terrain, where Russia’s numerical advantages would prove decisive, the Ukrainians instead decided to engage in a series of smaller-scale clashes. [64]

This has not been without its costs, Kofman says. Ukrainians have suffered significant losses, too. Russia’s numerical and technological advantages remain and could yet prove decisive, allowing the Russians to besiege Ukraine’s major cities and starve them into submission. [65] Still, the Ukrainian strategy has been effective and British intelligence reported on March 18 that Russia’s offensive had “largely stopped on all fronts.” [66] According to Mason Clark, an expert on the Russian military, “Ongoing Russian efforts to replace combat losses in EMD units and deploy additional reinforcements forward are unlikely to enable Russia to successfully resume major operations around Kyiv in the near future.” [67]

What is the problem of the Russian army?

Within a few days, it became clear that Russia had both overestimated its own advantages and underestimated its opponent. Zach Beauchamp of Vox wrote,

Once Putin’s strategy failed in the first few days of fighting, the Russian generals had to craft a new one on the fly. What they found – massive artillery bombardments and attempts to encircle and besiege major Ukrainian cities – is more effective (and brutal). But Russia’s initial failures gave Ukraine crucial time to entrench itself and receive external supplies from NATO forces, which strengthened its defenses. [68]

The Russian Army proved unable to adapt to a new situation, was poor at logistics, unable to move its troops and maintain their supplies; it was bad at coordination of air and land forces; and its communications were poor. [69] Some of these problems, such as fuel supplies, may have been the result of the political corruption rife in Russia. Issues such a fuel procurement existed long before the war. [70]

As a result, Russia’s losses have been quite significant. The Ukrainian Armed Forces, which may exaggerate Russian losses, reported a week ago that 16,400 Russian soldiers had been killed since Feb. 24. The UAF also claims that Russia has lost 575 tanks, 1,640 armored vehicles, 1,131 cars, 293 artillery pieces, 91 multiple rocket launchers, 51 surface-to-air missiles, at least 117 jets, 127 helicopters, 7 boats/ships, 73 fuel tankers, and 56 drones. [71] Other sources such as NATO given similar numbers. Ukrainian and Western sources report that an extraordinary seven Russian generals have been killed. [72]

Reporter Zach Beauchamp of Vox writes:

A recent U.S. intelligence assessment states that Russia “lost more than 10 percent of its initial invasion force due to a combination of factors such as battlefield deaths, injuries, capture, illness, and desertion.” “Once they are below 75 percent, their overall effectiveness is likely to collapse,” writes Phillips

Russia, with its overwhelming air superiority, should be winning the air war, but according to Beauchamp, so far it is not. [74]

It is not surprising that in these circumstances morale in the Russian Army would be low, especially given that according to military analysts it was already low before the war began. The Russian army is riddled with divisions, between the contract soldiers and the conscripted soldiers and between the various ethnic groups, and there is also widespread corruption and brutality against the conscripts. It is these conditions that account in part for the army's failures. [75]

As discussed earlier, a stalemate can be ended if one party can find a new ally. Ukraine has been receiving supplies from the liberal capitalist democracies of NATO while Russia, an authoritarian capitalist regime that many leftwing observers characterize as tending toward fascism, has turned to the kindred Chinese government, but, "China has publicly stated that it will not provide financial or military aid to Russia and has promised additional humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but blamed the United States for the war in Ukraine." [76]

Russia is also attempting to win the war by increasing the size of its military. According to the Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate, Russia "continues to deploy reserves from the central and eastern military districts." According to the same source, the conscripts in these regions "are supplied with military equipment from the 1970s." The same source indicates that Russian forces are "in dire need of repairing and rebuilding damaged weapons and military equipment" and that "a lack of foreign-made components is slowing

production in key Russian military industries." [77]

Another ISW article notes that, "Russian forces are unlikely to successfully resolve their command and control issues in the near term. A senior US defense official stated on March 21 that Russian forces are increasingly using unsecured communications due to lacking sufficient capacity on secured networks." [78] This means that since their radios or telephones aren't working, Russian soldiers sometimes use their own phones or phones taken from Ukrainians.

Meanwhile, Russia still seems to have failed to resolve its command-and-control problems. CNN cites several sources as saying that it is unclear whether "Russia has appointed a general commander for the invasion of Ukraine" and that "Russian units in different military districts appear to be fighting over resources and not coordinating their operations." [79]

Russia has lost thousands of troops, but it cannot rely on its reserves or conscripts. Another Institute of War neocon, Mason Clark, writes:

With no new large sources of fighters, Russia may be forced to give up its offensive campaign.

With his troops stalemated in Ukraine and unable to take most of the cities they had surrounded, Putin decided he would bomb the cities. As of March 28, his planes have bombed some 67

towns and cities apparently to punish Ukraine for frustrating his plans and showing the incompetence of his generals, the stupidity of their strategies, their lack of logistic and communication capability, and the poor quality of their equipment. Putin's air force has intentionally bombed not only military targets, but also many residential areas, destroying schools and hospitals, homes and apartment buildings forcing ten million-25% of the population from their homes, and over 3.5 million have left the country. [81] Thousands of civilians have been killed. Russia has been accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity for its attack on civilian targets and of using cluster bombs and is now being investigated by the International Criminal Court, [82] though Putin and the Russian Federation (like the United States) don't recognize its jurisdiction.

So, though the war is at an impasse, the Russian destruction of cities and murder of civilians goes on. We should also note that the Russian Army and the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB - the successor to the KGB) have been kidnapping Ukrainian civilians, and reportedly deporting some of them to Russia. Among the kidnapped are artists, [83] journalists [84], and political figures, [85] as well as children. [86] All of this together, the bombing of cities, the murder and kidnapping of civilians, is what has been called "total war," an attempt to win the war by completely terrorizing and demoralizing the Ukrainian population. And these are, of course, crimes against humanity.

Still, it is not clear that even inhuman tactics can change the balance in the war.

What is the state of the stalemate at this point? Russia, having destroyed 80 percent of Mariupol, has still not taken control of the city, though it may soon. Frustrated in its ground war Russia has expanded its artillery, missile, and air attacks, bombing several Ukrainian cities. While it says it has turned its forces to the east, to Donbas, it will probably continue to bomb Kyiv. Ukrainian resistance has forced Russia to divert troops and tanks to defend its rear." [87]

Due largely to the heroism of the Ukrainian resistance, a very smart combination of the twenty-first century version of the “art of war,” modern weaponry that can be used by the so called “techno-guerillas” in the national resistance, and the participation of ordinary people in the war, Ukraine has had an initial success. The stalemate of the Russian army led to a victory in Kyiv. The Russian forces are obliged to withdraw to the East and South of the country. It is a political victory as well as a military, even if, obviously, the war is not ended and Putin’s Russia can still be victorious.

As we can see, Russian forces are trying to join up to occupy the East of the country nearer Russia. Nevertheless, according to some sources, the Russian forces withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine for “redeployment to eastern Ukraine are heavily damaged.” [88] And if we are to believe the Ukrainian General Staff, the Russian soldiers do not seem very

motivated and sometimes disobey orders. Thus, according to this same source, “two tactical groups of battalions” that had very recently been transferred from South Ossetia to Donbass, “refused to fight” and soldiers of the Russian 31st Airborne Brigade reportedly refused the order to resume fighting, “citing excessive losses.”

Every day of resistance is a day of winning, every day is a grain of sand in Putin’s war machine. With each passing day, Putin’s fascistic regime will face increasing internal resistance. With each passing day, we shall see the labor movement rising up against Putin’s war, striking and blocking Russian ships, as the British and Swedish dockers have already been doing. The Ukrainian people in arms and the Russian people under the boot need us internationalists to build a powerful resistance movement in all countries against Russia’s war on Ukraine, a movement that in its own independent role contributes to

the defeat of Russian imperialism, the end of the war and the defense of a free and democratic Ukraine.

To make a provisional conclusion, let’s quote Gilbert Achcar:

Supporting Ukraine’s position in negotiations about its own national territory requires a support to its resistance and its right to acquire the weapons that are necessary for its defense from whichever source possesses such weapons and is willing to provide them. Refusing Ukraine’s right to acquire such weapons is basically a call for it to capitulate. In the face of an overwhelmingly armed and most brutal invader, this is actually defeatism on the wrong side, amounting virtually to support for the invader. [89]

5 April 2022

Source [New Politics](#).

Putin is not only waging war on Ukraine, he is also destroying Russian society

5 April 2022, by **Karine Clément**

It may well be that this one-size-fits-all vision corresponds to at least part of the reality. But it may be that we do not know at all what is going on in the depths of Russian society. Analysts, researchers, and politicians have never really examined or focused on ordinary people. In all countries the working classes are always counted as what is left over, the non-essential part. But Russia, obsessed with the myth of “great Russian culture” and the underdevelopment of its “muzhiks”, (=Russian peasant but here meaning all working people -Tr) has raised social contempt for its people to a level that is difficult to equal. What if the “muzhiks” simply need support to express their criticism and protest? In any case, the survival of Russian society today depends

fundamentally on whether the educated and dissident middle classes find the means to renew contact with the working classes.

Because let us remember that Russia is above all the popular classes – workers, employees and small entrepreneurs earning their living in a more or less precarious way. They constitute the absolute majority of the population. It is also these social classes that provide the bulk of the soldiers sent to Ukraine, whether by deception, by force, by the need to feed their families or by conviction. However, we hear the least about them, especially since they hardly speak, at least not in a clearly audible and recognizable voice.

The Russian working class in the 1990s and then under Putin

Surveys from 2018 have recorded, the emergence as a social community conscious of itself, that is to say a change not to be underestimated given how much working people, and particularly the industrial working class, had been mistreated by the ultra-liberal capitalist reforms and the frenzied anti-communism of the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall. [90] Let us remember: the working class was then annihilated, every man for

himself and surviving on your wits were how people lived. Misery and disarray bent the spine of millions of people. The privatization or closure of their factory/mine, the dislocation of the USSR and the radical change in the dominant discourse meant working people lost all assurance, all landmarks, their very roots in any decipherable social reality. Practically no one, called themselves a worker, nor saw themselves as part of any social community, be it working class or national or any other. Most humiliated themselves by comparing themselves to “screws drawn into an inhuman mechanism”, to “cattle” or “slaves”.

In comparison, the first two decades of the new century offer a completely different picture. Certainly there is the establishment of Putin’s authoritarian regime and the exclusion of workers voices from the public media (even if they were already absent from this space dominated by the Yeltsinian oligarchy in the 1990s). However there is also a real improvement in living conditions and a social stability which has enabled many people to regain their footing and come to terms with their life experience. There was also an intermittent populist Putin discourse, which, while caricaturing the working class, did at least make it reappear in the media sphere. Finally, there was Putin’s patriotic discourse which, contrary to the Kremlin’s objectives, politicized society, and, paradoxically, presented the national community as a political object allowing even dissent. Indeed, from the mid-2000s we witnessed a proliferation of grassroots mobilizations taking up social, ecological or work issues, which testified to the expansion of self-organization across the whole country.

Consciousness also evolved, society was restructured – despite, or perhaps even thanks to the nationalist authoritarianism of the Kremlin. In any case, the vast research that I led in the years 2016-2018 showed the expansion of a self-organizing process throughout the country. We were able to clearly identify three social groups. [91]

Three social groups among Russian working people

The first was not the biggest and was composed above all of people on an upward social trajectory: that of the conformists, for whom the important thing was to be able to project themselves into a large “single and united” national community. This category largely endorsed patriotic propaganda and overwhelmingly placed their faith in Putin.

The second group consisted of people who defined themselves above all by their intellectual or moral qualities and identified with the intellectual elite, against the “mass of the ignorant poor”. This group of intellectuals or moralizers, although having in common the same social contempt for the working classes, split into two diametrically opposed camps: one pro-Putin supporting the patriotic project of the Kremlin orchestrating the revival of “great Russian culture”, the other anti-Putin and rejecting any attachment to a nation deemed “crappy”.

Finally, the third group was the largest, that of the working classes who saw themselves as a large community, that of the “working and poor people” and who valued solidarity in a critique of social inequalities and the exploitation of the majority by a minority of oligarchs who were protected by the regime and its ideology of lying patriotism.

I do not list these three groups here as an exercise in academic classification but to highlight the social structuring which has emerged from the post-communist upheavals. There are clear divisions between the bourgeoisie or the aspirants to the bourgeoisie, the educated middle classes with elitist aspirations, and the popular classes. But while we know something about the first two groups, very little information circulates on what is happening to the popular classes today that Russia is engaged in the war in Ukraine.

The first group arguably poured heart and soul into supporting Putin’s military operation, while another part left Russia to maintain a sanctions-threatened standard of living. The second group, the one whose voices are loudest on social networks, is torn between pro- and anti-war positions, those who display their “shame” of being Russian against those who are more than ever proud of it. It is the points of view of these educated middle classes that are conveyed in our media, it is these same representatives opposed to the war who find themselves for a large part fleeing Russia. These are the voices that denounce the immorality of Russian society, its passivity, its lobotomization, the ease with which it adheres to the pro-war propaganda of the Kremlin.

Working people are key to any real change

I obviously support the colleagues abandoning everything to leave, I respect their moral firmness and their courage. I regret, however, that once again, as in the 1990s, the educated middle classes, in their elitist self-identification, transmit, again and again, the same distorted and demeaning image of the working classes, those who are the majority of people in Russia. It seems to me absolutely necessary, as indeed beautifully expressed in his “Letter to my Russian friends” Jonathan Littell, that those who see themselves as intellectual and moral elites begin at least to try to listen to and understand the working classes. [92] No lasting overthrow of the regime, no real democratization can ever take place without the support and active participation of the latter.

Working people are capable of mobilization, they have already shown it on many occasions. Let us cite, for example:

- the mobilizations of hundreds of thousands of people against the so-called “monetization of social benefits” reform in 2005,
- the massive and lasting movements

of certain regions in defence of their autonomy against the “arbitrary rule of Moscow” (Kaliningrad in 2010, Khabarovsk in 2020),

- the popular rebellions of the mono-industrial cities (Pikalevo and others, in 2009),
- the movement against the pension reform (2008),
- the ecological mobilizations (notably in Shies, in 2019-2020, against a landfill for waste from Moscow).

So the problem is not the capacity for self-organization, the problem is the agenda – is it about fighting so that our lot, that of little people like us, also improves, or will we be, once again, the victims of struggles that are beyond us and whose ins and outs we do not control? The problem is also the acute distrust felt towards the liberal opposition, or even elites on all sides, perceived as contemptuous and sharing nothing of the real life experience of the “working classes”. Finally, the problem also lies in what distinguishes the Russian working classes from their Western counterparts, namely a strong feeling of helplessness when it comes to issues related to national political power: what can be done in the face of oligarchy, while “they” have “the money”.

This feeling of impotence has not faded, despite numerous victorious mobilizations (but with little media coverage). It even strengthened as the working classes began to understand political repression, in particular from 2021 and the incarceration of Alexei Navalny. However the war, the atmosphere of general surveillance by the forces of order, as well as the image produced by the media of unanimity around Putin further encourage people to keep their doubts and questions to themselves.

Working people and their attitude to the war

Are the popular classes against the war? There is nothing to confirm this, given the little information we have. The critics of the majority support of the lower classes for the war are most

often satisfied with polls (in times of war and censorship!), fragmentary discussions with parents, or comments collected at the hairdresser or in the taxi... From my survey experience, what can I assume?

I would have been tempted to argue that the working classes, inclined to be wary of propaganda and misleading words, would not be easily fooled by pro-war propaganda (the Russians would save “their” own from the clutches of the “Nazis” in the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine). Perhaps working people would keep a cool head and an ironic distance. However, one element introduces doubt: propaganda was above all denounced as false when it could be contradicted by experiential data, by life experience, when it was confronted with an alternative narrative, articulated in informal discussions, jokes, collusion...the certainty of one’s criticism being backed by the approving echo that emanated from the imaginary community of a “little people”.

But how can one experience a war that does not take place in one’s immediate space and when ultra-contradictory information reaches you through unreliable channels? How can we be certain of sharing the same critical distance with an imaginary community whose opinions we no longer really know. There is a lack of a proven alternative narrative, given the lack of free speech, even in informal spaces. Are the working classes then tempted to trust the television version, for lack of anything better? To cling to what is presented as the general opinion? No doubt this is at least partly what is happening now.

Without the war, I would have said that the working classes had the ability to build together a counter-narrative of what is happening, a narrative of subversive and disrespectful irony, which would present the war as yet another illustration of the crimes of the powerful of this world, against the little ones who always bear the brunt of their ambitions. Such a story could include the Ukrainian people in the imaginary community of the victims of history. But is there still an imaginary common world of ordinary people?

Isn’t the very basis of their existence – social interactions, the self-assurance, their living space – wavering under their feet?

Without the war, I would have said that the working classes were on principle wary of the ‘humanist’ designs of the rulers and the powerful, suspected a priori of serving their own interests above all. But a murderous offensive carried out on a brotherly, neighbouring country, of the same culture, undoubtedly exceeds the limits of the darkness attributed to the oligarchs.

So it seems likely that a large part of the working classes will again find themselves lost in the chaos and the absence of benchmarks, which translates into a wait-and-see attitude, a more or less active denial, a posture of defence or withdrawal. This is neither support for the war nor for Putin; but neither is it an opposition.

How could this situation evolve?

An alternative narrative would have to manage to be audible and to resonate with the ways of working people see the world. This could emerge from real mobilizations and common struggles, in particular when the sanctions and the deterioration of living conditions come to be felt. Can it arise from educated middle classes rising up against war? Yes but on the sole condition that the latter are not perceived as coming from elites despising working people. In any case, a counter-narrative expressed exclusively by a minority in exile would have no impact. Alexei Navalny succeeded in appearing as a serious opponent concerned about the fate of Russia precisely because he took the risk of returning to the country.

A significant shock would have to hit people in their day to day lives. This shock may very well come from the arrival of the coffins of Russian soldiers killed in the war, especially since these soldiers, enlisted or forced to enlist, come en masse from the working classes.

In any case, a sudden reversal of

opinion, as well as massive protests, cannot be ruled out. What is to be excluded, on the other hand, is a position based on abstract moral or political values. The whole experience of the working classes has indeed taught them to be wary of moral lessons and great democratic slogans, especially if they are perceived as coming from the West or from a pro-Western liberal elite. The 1990s taught them how much “democratic and humanist values” could turn against them and result in their

impoverishment and subjugation.

The educated and progressive middle class can play a role in triggering a dynamic of protest. The stakes are high: it is not only a question of stopping the war and guaranteeing Ukrainian sovereignty, but also of avoiding the annihilation of Russian society, the relapse into a dynamic of disarray, impoverishment, atomization, apathy and anomie even more destructive than in the 1990s. To

meet the challenge, it is absolutely necessary that part of this middle class shed its elitism and social contempt, that it renews a confident and empathetic dialogue with the popular classes and that it participates with them in the elaboration of a new perspective to overcome the crisis, of a break with the Putin regime, of real democratization and of the redistribution of wealth.

*This article was translated from French by Anti*Capitalist Resistance.*

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Interview with a Volunteer from the Kiev Territorial Defense

4 April 2022, by **Perrine Poupin, Taras Kobzar**

Perrine Poupin (P.P.): How did you experience the beginning of the war, on February 24, 2022?

Taras Kobzar (T.K.): Even though until the last days there was a lot of talk about the possibility of war, I never wanted to believe it. Most ordinary Ukrainians were taken by surprise by the attack by Russian troops. Like other people, I was woken up early in the morning by explosion sounds that sounded in the sky. Around 5 a.m., Russian planes (I later learned that they were drones) attacked Boryspil Airport (the largest civilian airport in Ukraine), located on the outskirts of the city of Kiev. I went out on the balcony and heard exchanges of fire between the air defense of the Ukrainian army and the Russian air force. At first, I wanted to believe that this was just a military provocation to put pressure on Ukraine. And that it would end like this. No one wanted to believe in an all-out and protracted war. Despite warnings from Western intelligence services, especially US and British, and many other signs, no one wanted to believe it. It was not believed that Putin would embark on such an adventure. The war was a great shock to the Ukrainians. I feel unreality. I had a similar experience in Donetsk in 2014.

P.P.: Why do you think Russia is attacking Ukraine now?

T.K.: This war marks the return of the imperial ambitions of the Kremlin and Putin, who considers that his historical mission is to re-establish the borders of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. His aspiration is to make Russia an influential empire again in the world, as in Soviet times, by “recovering” the “Russian lands” that became independent states more than thirty years ago, when the Soviet Union collapsed. Putin was greatly encouraged by the positive reaction of Russian society to the annexation of Crimea. I also think he saw the lack of a strong Western response to its criminal activities as evidence of weakness and as a sign that the West would not be an obstacle to his plans.

Another reason for this war is that Putin has decided, in view of the next Russian presidential election in 2024 (the outcome of which is already decided in advance), to offer the country's chauvinist majority another spectacular victory, which proves the greatness of Russia, personified by a great president. This is a way to ensure that his popularity rating skyrockets with this electorate. Putin wants to go down in history as the

grandfather of the nation, much like Stalin. Ukraine stands in the way of its plans with its independent, pro-Western and anti-Russian attitude.

P.P.: Many analysts draw a parallel with the war in Syria. What do you think?

T.K.: Many Ukrainian cities are already hardly different from Aleppo: they are in whole or in part in ruins. Russian soldiers shoot unscrupulously at civilians and residential neighborhoods. We will never forgive or forget that. Russia's notorious military machine is facing a people in Ukraine who will fight to the end. The experience gained by the Russians in the wars they have waged in recent years, whether in Syria or elsewhere, will not be enough for them to defeat us. The Russian military machine, despite its terrible reputation, turns out to be a colossus with feet of clay, just like the Russian Empire as a whole. This war will destroy the Putin regime. The Ukrainian army and society have changed a lot since 2014. Just as Ireland was said to be a bird that would devour the liver of the British Empire, Ukraine today is a small but formidable country that will bring about the fall of the last fascist empire in this world.

P.P.: How has the political landscape changed in Ukraine since the Maidan Revolution? [93] What are the different political forces involved? What about the weight of far-right movements?

T.K.: Initially, I was skeptical of the Maidan movement. In the first few weeks, I had the impression that this was just a political masquerade to prepare for the elections in Ukraine. But over time, this uprising clearly emerged as a genuine national revolution, as a profound refoundation of the Ukrainian political and social community from a real self-organization of civil society.

The oppositions between right and left are now fading in the face of the imperative need to face a common problem: to defend people's lives, the territorial integrity of the country and the future of our young democracy. Today, values such as political freedom, grassroots self-organization, social reforms, the possibility for the people to arm themselves, the alternation of power based on an electoral process, respect for fundamental rights, the self-awareness of the people are at the heart of the struggle waged by all Ukrainians. These principles radically distinguish Ukrainian society united by a common historical destiny from the authoritarian, chauvinist and racist aggressor against whom we are fighting.

Three tendencies with their own historical traditions, stemming from the revolution and civil war of a century ago (1917-1922), are now organically linked in Ukraine: the Makhnovschina, the Petlyurovshchina and the Hetmanschina. The Makhnovshchina has its roots in the anarchist tradition of the Ukrainian people, which is embodied today in the self-organization that this people demonstrates, especially through the voluntary movement and territorial defense; the Petlyurovshchina is the army and national republican associations; Hetmanschtchina is state power and the business world. All these tendencies are now united by the same desire to defend the country, by the same concern to see this country develop freely and independently. It is only after the war

that we will be able to see what will really happen, but today, we live a unique situation: everyone is talking to each other. It reminds me of republican Spain in 1936. President Zelensky also recalls President Manuel Azaña. So currently, we can in no way speak of competition or opposition between these different political currents.

I serve in a unit created by nationalists, which is supplied by municipal authorities and volunteers, and which is financed by private companies. We give courses on anarchism to combatants and we organize soldiers' committees that ensure the well-being of combatants and respect for their rights without this being a problem. One can find weapon in hand in the same trench an anarchist, a nationalist, a Euro-optimist, a simple peasant, a worker or a computer scientist without a precise political opinion. All are united by the same desire to protect their people, and the independence and freedom of Ukraine. We are all brothers and sisters, we are the people! This is the universally shared slogan and the only ideology that reigns today. The French Revolution of 1789 created a French nation, the Ukrainian Revolution of 2013-14 and especially the war of 2022 are creating a new nation, the Ukrainian nation. The people woke up. The 600 years of struggle and suffering of the Ukrainian people are coming to an end.

P.P.: Who are the people who are committed? Why and for what purpose? What can we say about nationalism in Ukraine, a subject that fascinates some commentators here in France?

T.K.: It is difficult to say now what will happen after this war. Whatever its outcome, Ukraine has already won. It has won morally, spiritually, politically and socially. Perhaps years of maturation, years of new social battles and class struggle within society await us. Struggles for social transformation, a series of new revolutions. But all this will make it possible for today's war, a war that is both a war of liberation and a social war. A war between an empire and a republic, between law and contempt

for the law, between life and death, between freedom and slavery.

In this context, Ukrainian nationalism is similar to the nationalism of the Irish in their struggle against the British Empire. It is a liberating and creative nationalism. It is a national liberation struggle led by the people. The influence of radical groups is not as great as it seems from the outside. This war poses a threat of genocide to the Ukrainian people. Faced with the danger posed by this annihilation, unity is necessary, even if it will fade over time. But it is the essence of the movement that counts, the momentum of liberation that runs through Ukraine in the face of Russian social racism that denies us the right to exist on principle. Words, banners and historical identification markers are no more than aesthetics or symbols. They have long since ceased to have the meanings that we are trying to attribute to them. The red flag and the words "anti-fascism" have a completely different meaning today than they did a century ago. Even as the Russian authorities reduce Ukrainian cities to rubble (we can speak of Twenty-first century Guernica), they are preparing to organize an "international anti-fascist congress". Is this irony? A mockery? Or the fulfillment of George Orwell's brilliant prophecy? Putin is the Hitler of today. There is nothing else to say.

P.P.: Who is President Zelensky? How did he come to power?

T.K.: Zelensky was a very popular comedian and entertainer in Ukraine. His election to the presidency reflected the desire of the people to see the emergence of people who were not associated with the old pre-war political establishment, the desire for a renewal of the political class. Zelensky's campaign slogan was "peace." Many Ukrainians had placed their hopes in him because they were tired of the war that had been going on since 2014. Zelensky had promised to find a way out of the current situation in Donbass and to settle the military conflict. In addition, Zelensky's team was committed to carrying out economic and political reforms that would benefit ordinary people. But these expectations were disappointed, and Zelensky's

government, like Zelensky himself, was severely criticized by different segments of society. It is a tradition in Ukraine to constantly and publicly criticize any authority, rather than sacralize it.

Initially, Zelensky's party was therefore perceived as the party of peace. But the Minsk agreements imposed by Russia proved impossible to implement, as it would have meant eternal blackmail of war on the part of the Kremlin and Ukraine's total dependence on Putin's will. These agreements provided for the forced recognition of separatist "republics" within Ukraine, which would have been entirely dependent on the Kremlin's decisions. The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 put an end to this ambiguous situation and showed that peace was not an option for Ukrainians. Russia does not want to collaborate with an independent partner country, it wants a vassal, a protectorate, a fully dependent territory. The invasion has once and for all exposed Putin's true intentions towards Ukraine, intentions that date back well before 2014. While President Zelensky had until then been a politician of disputed authority, hostage to circumstances, since the invasion he has transformed himself into a strong leader who enjoys the support of almost all citizens.

P.P.: What is the situation in Donbass? How do you analyze this one, you who are from the region?

T.K.: Everything that has been happening in Donbas since 2014 is a well-planned operation by the Kremlin. The development of separatist sentiments among the population of these regions that preceded the creation of the so-called "republics" was orchestrated from scratch by the Russian special services. I remember how it all began: I witnessed with my own eyes the theatrical staging of the "popular referendum" on the independence of Donbass and I witnessed the real number of people who participated. Pro-Russian sentiments in Donbas in 2014 were very limited. The situation has changed a lot over time. According to Russian propaganda, the number of supporters of Russia increased sharply, but this was done

gradually, in stages. In the spring of 2014, in major cities like Donetsk, pro-Russians were actually Russian citizens transported there by bus (especially from the Rostov region of Russia) to support pro-Russian actions by posing as locals.

At the same time, pro-Ukrainian rallies were held in Donetsk that brought together a very large number of real inhabitants, as shown in many photos and videos, and as I have witnessed. Street fighting between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian protesters broke out in the spring of 2014 that resulted in injuries on the Ukrainian side. Supporters of Russia were actively supplied with weapons from specially established bases in Rostov. Donetsk has been flooded with Russian security agents on the orders of the Kremlin, overseen in particular by Sergey Glazyev, a prominent politician. It was then that the killings of Ukrainian civilian activists and the persecution of Ukrainians began.

The situation then changed dramatically when Russian militant groups began arriving in Donetsk and lobbied to create a separatist militia led by the FSB. In the summer, the situation degenerated into direct hostilities with units of the Ukrainian army and with the use of artillery and aviation. Pro-Russian security services fired mortars into residential areas, accusing the Ukrainian army of being responsible. These provocations made it possible to create the climate desired by the occupiers.

The third step in creating pro-Russian sentiment was the creation of the "Donetsk People's Republic", whose territory was isolated from the rest of Ukraine. In this regime of isolation, with the help of the pro-Russian media, public opinion was handed over to the Kremlin's propaganda. In institutions, universities and educational institutions there began to be an atmosphere of "1937" (when the Stalinist purges provoked the execution and deportation to Soviet labor camps of several million Ukrainians).

Currently, according to the information I have, a significant part of the population of the separatist enclaves is favorable to Ukraine and

does not accept the state of affairs in the "republics". In 2014, Donetsk was a rich and developed region, where the standard of living was much higher than in many other regions in Ukraine, such as those around the cities of Zaporizhzhia or Dnipro. The Communist Party (CPU) had little influence in the Donetsk region. For example, his supporters were not much more numerous than the anarchists during the May 1 demonstrations. It is therefore strange to speak of any nostalgia for the Soviet Union. All these feelings were artificially fabricated as part of the "Russian Spring" project.

P.P.: How has the Ukrainian army evolved since 2014, when it was almost non-existent?

T.K.: In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and started the war in Donbass, the Ukrainian army was indeed very weak and insufficiently mobilized. During Ukraine's thirty years of independence (1991-2014), the Ukrainian government failed to reform the army, rearm it, create a high civic consciousness among the military, and provide them with effective training in modern warfare. Survival of the former "Soviet" army, the Ukrainian army was more of a decoration than a real armed force. The same goes for the Ukrainian Navy. In addition, Russia was never considered a military threat and there was no plan for a possible military conflict. The military leadership of the Ukrainian army was composed mainly of people with a more bureaucratic than military mind, pro-Russian and from a "Soviet military tradition" that they shared with their Russian "colleagues". Therefore, there were very few units of the Ukrainian army able to withstand the Russian invasion in 2014. Few Ukrainians were psychologically prepared to shoot at the Russians. As a result, in the early years of the war, the defense effort was mostly supported by formations of Ukrainian volunteers, patriotic-minded citizens and partisan units, poorly equipped and inexperienced in combat.

The eight years of war (2014-2022) have seen this situation change radically. An effective and well-equipped army has been set up, highly

motivated and with real combat experience. A territorial defense force capable of being deployed in the event of a general war was established, with community training centers run by volunteers where civilians could receive basic military training. All this made it possible to put up effective resistance to Russian troops during the invasion in February 2022. The army, armed people and civilian volunteers are now operating in a coordinated manner throughout the country, which has helped counter the Kremlin's blitzkrieg attempt, which hoped to cross the border and quickly seize Ukraine's most important centers. In addition, the Ukrainian population is much more organized and united than in 2014. The Russian military was not welcomed by anyone, and there was no attempt by the civilian population to form new pro-Russian enclaves.

P.P.: This war is causing a lot of discussion and tension in the Western militant world. How do you position yourself in relation to the NATO vs Russia debate?

T.K.: Among the supporters of a democratic and republican Ukraine, there is no doubt about the desire to integrate Europe and adherence to the values of Western democracy. If one has to choose between the totalitarian regime of Putin's empire and Western democracy (while remaining lucid about its flaws), the choice in Ukraine is clearly and irrevocably in favor of the West. Faced with the prospect of being crushed by the Kremlin's imperial ambitions (Russia does not even recognize the existence of Ukrainians as an independent people), the idea of becoming an ally of NATO, the EU and the US does not seem like a terrible thing. The problem of NATO's eastward expansion (even if it is a reality rather than a scarecrow or chimera as in the Cold War era) is not a problem for Ukraine, but for Russia.

It is not acceptable for Russia to solve its geopolitical problems through the genocide of the Ukrainian people. These issues could have been resolved through international negotiations. But now Putin has lost that opportunity and there is no other strategy than the destruction of the Russian aggressor regime. It is obvious to everyone that the Russian militarist machine will not stop in Ukraine. After Ukraine, the war will spread to the Baltic States and even further into Eastern Europe, via Poland. The Kremlin is talking about a space of influence from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, so we should not be under any illusions about what will happen next. It is a repetition of history with Hitler and the great Reich. Ukraine's desire to ally itself with Western democracies is therefore justified, it is obvious. The war in Ukraine is a matter of survival not only for Ukraine, but also for Europe. If today's Russia believes it is allowed to react in this way to avoid having NATO on its borders (assuming for a moment that this rhetoric is admissible), then let this Russia go to hell!

A separate question for leftists and anarchists is what strategy to adopt that is in line with their ideological principles. For me, the solution is simple. As long as Hitler exists (personally or collectively), the left must oppose and fight him, and Hitler's enemies are our allies. After Hitler's defeat, a new era will open in which local and international class strategies will have their place. This was the case during the Second World War, it should be the same today.

In my opinion, public life in Ukraine since the Maidan revolution has been crossed on all sides by tendencies that I consider rather libertarian. The names, colors and shapes differ from those of traditional anarchist forces, but in their essence, these dynamics are part of the principles of

anarchism: electoral activity and alternation of power, direct democracy, self-organization and development of horizontal bonds, universal armament of the people, spontaneity and sense of initiative, ability of grassroots civic groups to control government, free and transparent information within civil society and between citizens and the government. Certainly, many things exist in the embryonic state and coexist with bourgeois institutions and corruption, but everything is evolving and it is in our power to continue what we have started since Maidan.

In Putin's Russia, there is none of this: it is a police state where the cult of bloodthirsty dictators reigns and where militarism, chauvinism and racism are elevated to the rank of state religion that permeates all strata of society. From this point of view, there is no possible comparison with the presence or influence of radical ultra-right groups in Ukraine: these groups remain a very small minority in the country. Of course, I would prefer our war to be placed under the banner of Nestor Makhno (founder of the Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army, which, after the October Revolution and until 1921, fought both the counter-revolutionary Tsarist army and the Bolshevik Red Army) and not Stepan Bandera (Ukrainian politician and nationalist ideologue). who collaborated with Nazi Germany), although the figure of Makhno is quite popular here! I would of course like to fight in the name of anarchy rather than the Nation, but these are only symbols and words that do not change the real nature of the movement that runs through Ukraine. In any case, currently, to choose between: "Long live the King" and "Long live the Nation", I choose without hesitation the Nation!

Source *New Politics*. Originally published in French in *Mouvements*.

Step-by-step and systematic Chinese

inhumane policies for ethnic eradication

3 April 2022, by **Karen Yamanaka**

Why is the Chinese Government trying to make inward genocide?

Massacres have been repeated in Chinese history. Why is the Chinese government confining ethnic minorities to “educational facility” and making brainwashing without indiscriminate slaughter? That is due to the circumstances peculiar to China. The territory which includes the lands inhabited by 55 ethnic minorities and rather remarkable influence of their political groups cannot be ignored for the Chinese government. Under the circumstances, the Chinese government will have no justification for claiming that Xinjiang Uighur, Inner Mongolia, Tibet and other ethnic minority areas are Chinese territory if all minorities are slaughtered indiscriminately. In addition, the areas inhabited by some ethnic minorities such as Korean and Mongolian are adjacent to the independent nations unique to each ethnic group.

So most of the group members must be kept alive as citizens of China or as Chinese to maintain “territorial integrity”. And only a section of the ethnic group has been cracked down even if some opposite groups are repressed. Separation and independence of ethnic minorities means absorption of those ethnic groups into existing countries. It also means territorial losses for the Chinese government. For this reason, the Chinese government has made it an urgent task to accelerate assimilation of ethnic minorities into “monoethnic nation”. As a means for that, there was the continuous need for “education” and brainwashing. The ethnic minority without ethnic identity may become a voluntary collaborator

of the Chinese government and also become a good major pillar of Chinese nationalism as a citizen of China. Since their founding, the Chinese government has enforced and continued such inhumane policies.

Differences from the Nazi massacre

The (outer) body is kept alive as an ostensible ethnic minority, and inner is replaced with the Chinese style. This is the essence of the “brainwashing” project of the Chinese government. Nazi Germany and its collaborators committed national crimes of eradicating Jews in order to clear the Jewish elements from society. At that time, Jews could not find a place of peace anywhere in Europe. There will be similarities between Jewish massacre and Chinese minority eradication in that ethnic elements were eliminated [94]. But the latter differs from the former in that it possesses a relatively large territory compared to the ethnic majority group. Therefore, it is necessary for the Chinese government to continue to implement the brainwashing project while keeping the majority of ethnic minorities in China alive without physically eradicating them. And the Chinese government need to continue the project to prevent independence of ethnic minorities, which greatly influence the survival of the nation of China, and to realize their further expansive and robbery “territorial integrity”.

While cracking down on ethnic minorities, the Chinese government keep the majority of the inhabitants alive without killing them. However, even if the body is alive, the ethnic identity is dead. This is the difference between the Nazi persecution of Jews and the Chinese-style persecution against ethnic minorities.

Chinese inhumane project now and in the future

The project to prevent independence of ethnic minorities is progressing steadily to maintain “monoethnic nation independence.” In recent years, the Chinese government has made policy decisions to deprive each minority of their language. In Inner Mongolia, using Mongolian in the classes of Mongolian public schools was banned from September 2020. And a similar language ban policy is being implemented in Xinjiang Uighur. The language ban policy is in parallel with the ethnic division policy or the policy to take away ethnic self-determination. In Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang Uighur, there has also been the political policies implemented to separate the neighboring people of the same ethnic group.

The purpose of the murderous repression project is to maintain “territorial integrity” of the country of China. Combatting all kinds of oppression in China must entail tenacious unpacking of chauvinism of the Han majority ethnic group and other exclusionary ideologies. Ethnic minorities under China’s authoritarian regime are under dual control: the one-party rule of the Communist Party of China and the monopoly of political power by the Han ethnic group. And the demise of ethnic autonomy has led to the induction of ethnic turmoil. But building cross-border citizen solidarity and new forms of sustainable popular movement self-organized by oppressed people to restore self-determination is almost impossible or extremely difficult in the highly surveillance society. To address the situation, we must stand in international solidarity with our frontline communities near us. Ethnic minorities in China deserve our international solidarity in their

resistance and should be free to exercise their right to self-determination.

“In Switzerland, being a union member is almost like having the plague”

2 April 2022, by Tamara Knežević

Elif * (not her real name) is a 37-year-old worker of Belgian-Turkish origin who has held down several jobs in Switzerland for the past two and a half years to support herself. Elif actively participated in the strike against Smood from its inception in November, in the first town to go on strike – Yverdon.

Elif, you have been in Switzerland for almost three years, can you tell us how you arrived at Smood as a delivery woman?

I came through a French company that engaged in catering for Switzerland, and then life led me to work in other restaurants where I was dismissed with not much justification and that forced me to look for work and that's how I found Smood. In Belgium I graduated in Human Resources Management and am a specialized educator. I also have flight attendant training. I have several cards in my pocket. But in Switzerland, in order to use these diplomas, the procedure is very long and expensive and I do not have the time or the resources. So, I find myself doing jobs that are not, basically, in my line. I stumbled upon Smood because I can't use my qualifications here, I was forced to accept it.

In Belgium you were unionized. What are your experiences of struggles at work there? What is the difference with Swiss trade unionism?

The first big difference is that the union in Belgium is almost compulsory. The unemployment fund is linked to the union, is created by the union so suddenly, necessarily, when you enter the labour market, you

join a union. It's innate, it's done automatically, we don't ask ourselves the question, everyone is unionized. There's no stress in saying it because that's the way it is, and the bosses know about it. Here in Switzerland, I realized that being a union member is almost like having the plague, that's really it. They look at you askance when it is a legitimate right. And I think the bosses should get used to it more.

Regarding the struggle, personally I have not had one in Belgium. I didn't have any problems or worries with a boss, even if I had 2-3 conflicts it was quickly settled between us... The bosses do not like to go too far in Belgium because they know that the union is behind and that they will not necessarily win their case. On the other hand, where I have seen struggles in Belgium, it is via Carrefour Belgium, my mother has worked at Carrefour for 37 years. Carrefour therefore the department stores and large group that closed the stores while they were making a profit. There was a strike for a long time, so I experienced the strike in Belgium through my mother. My mother had no fear because she was unionized and because she was employed under the old contracts that they could not change. On the other hand, all the young people who had just started, and who had new contracts, were wrongfully dismissed.

Were your mother and her strike experience a resource for you during the Smood strike?

Of course, my mother was interested as she also experienced it, she knows what a strike is and that it is hard, that we must not let go and that we

must have morale. And finally in their strike at Carrefour, they won their case. The group has changed its restructuring plan, but it's national! These are really national procedures, and it is all the unions that are doing it, the reds, the greens and the neutrals. So, they got together against Carrefour.

On this subject, here you experienced the Unia-Syndicom union conflict at the beginning of the Smood strike. What do you think of this?

I find it sad. Because for me a union, whether green, red or blue, it is there for the well-being of workers and to protect them from employer injustice. So, I would have preferred Syndicom, Unia and the others to get together, facing Smood. United we stand, divided we fall.

What does the Smood movement, in which you actively participated with other comrades, mean to you, in terms of collective dynamics and the creation of a collective of struggle?

It creates links, necessarily, it creates a team. As you say, before it was each individual for themselves, whereas there we created a group that fought. If it were up to me, we would have continued the struggle to the end. In my opinion, the only way to make a boss give way is to strike. So, it was good but it's a shame that in the end, we ran out of steam from the moment we realized that the legal system was not necessarily fair. I think that was the trigger for some who went back to work. At that very moment, we lost hope of having something correct. It's clear that we will eventually get

something, but when? How? The fact that the legal system takes time like this, it suggests that in the end it is a waste of time.

At the beginning of the strike, how did you experience its gradual expansion from one town to another?

It gave me hope because it was reminiscent of the strikes I experienced in Belgium with my mother. It started with one town and then it took on a national dimension. I really believed that we were moving towards a national project. So, it was sad not to be able to do that and honestly, I told you from the beginning, or even when we discussed our actions to redo, I was for going on strike again, maybe in other circumstances and otherwise, but going on strike again. Don't work. For me it is the only tool that allows workers to put pressure on the company.

Yes, and Smood said that the strike did not affect them financially

Yes, because it hired a bunch of people instead, when it is not legally entitled to do so. You know it better than me, but I think it's borderline. But I find that here in Switzerland we do not have this philosophy, this way of seeing things. In Switzerland we don't alienate the boss too much in fact. This is different from the Belgian or French mentality which is combative, which goes on strike for a yes or a no.

What affected you the most in this strike and what will you keep as memories?

What I want to keep from this story is really the unity we had at the beginning. It's cohesion, the fact of being together, of wanting to change things. I think the most close-knit group was the Yverdon group. It started from Yverdon and in my opinion the group that held firm the most is Yverdon. The sad thing is that we ran out of breath.

Do you still have a Smood group among colleagues?

We have a WhatsApp group where we

share things. It has resumed its course, today we re-share deliveries then, and no longer the struggle. I don't even look anymore because it disgusts me. It is not the colleagues who disgust me, they have to work, they have to earn a living and that is quite normal. But it disgusts me on the point when we go into action, I think we have to go to the end, I don't know, maybe it's my character.

In your opinion, has the dismissal of several colleagues changed the dynamics of the group?

I think it particularly scared others who didn't have the option of losing this job. This held them back in their momentum. I can understand people, as I told you, they do not have the option to lose it, I was already less affected by this strike because I had my other job that I still have. I was doing Smood in addition so for me if it's not that, it's something else, so I had no fear of losing this job. But those who have only this to live, I can understand that it slows them down, yes. This is what has also played an important role in weakening the dynamics of struggle.

Smood was an important source of income for many people while in the media the work of platforms is often presented as being composed mainly of students.

We do not realize but there are plenty for whom Smood is a first source of income. Young students are rare. When you look at the groups we had on strike, it's mostly the people who lived off that. Because students, whether they make Smood or local coffee, it's equal. But those who went on strike were people who lived from Smood, who only had Smood to live on. Finally, it's a job for a bunch of people who had only found this job for the moment and who live off it.

How do you assess the union's contribution to this struggle?

I have no criticism of the union, you have led a positive dynamic, especially you, you carried it out well, you tried to do it correctly and made sure to support us. The only thing that saddens me a little is that we are not on strike. Even if it means going on

strike in the face of the judgment. It's clear that we can't be above the law, I understand things, but still... If I return to Carrefour Belgium and the workers, the state was initially OK with Carrefour but then seeing that it had taken on a national scale, that all the unions joined the struggle, the state changed its mind. Following the balance of power, the state turned its coat and forced Carrefour to do things differently, whereas initially, it brought money to the state so necessarily they agreed with the Carrefour. The national dynamic turned everything upside down! For Smood, I think it took a bit too long to go a little to all the cantons.

How do you see the future? The strike may not have been enough to make Smood back down but what prospects do you see in the future on the issue of platforms in Switzerland?

I think that on the one hand we need to create a platform, for example for restaurants, which helps workers to complain about these kinds of places and to denounce them. I think that Unia, (well, legally speaking I do not know how we can tie this up) but that Unia can put pressure on these kinds of platforms, via this blacklist and denunciations from workers. On the other hand, to have a direct link with the state to transmit the complaints we receive and put pressure, not on an employer but on a joint committee, which generates the obligation for all employers to comply. It could exist and create direct collaboration with the state for this kind of thing. I think there are a lot of people who are desperate and would like to be heard, that's important.

Today, after months of struggle, you have decided to turn the page on Smood. How has this happened?

As I told you, I no longer want to pay to work. Anyway, it was an accessory job for me and Smood did not contribute for me, it mostly cost me. The only thing that was positive was that we were supported, financially and morally by Unia. Because this is important and compared to Belgium, the strike fund is better organized here. There it exists but it is so

ridiculous while here we were supported correctly, even if it was not equivalent to the wage. You can't spit

on what Unia did, I don't think it's right. But now I turn to new horizons, we will see, maybe working for Unia, who knows (laughs)!

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Solidarités**.*

Invisibilities, Visibilities, and Liberation

1 April 2022, by **Rowan Fortune**

For quite a period now International Trans Visibility Day has felt, for the trans community at large, increasingly hollow. First conceived by Michigan transgender activist Rachel Crandall in 2009, at that time it aimed to counterbalance the mourning of Transgender Day of Remembrance by celebrating the lives and accomplishments of trans people. It was also a response to the sidelining of transgender people in the broader LGBT community. Subsequently, Joe Biden gave the stamp of US government approval to it, the culmination of making liberal trans rights a centerpiece of his presidential election campaign. (Although he has done little to nothing for trans Americans subsequently, having put them in the crosshairs of GOP reactionary opportunists.)

The situation in 2022 is substantively different to what it was in 2009. Trans liberation (and the securing of access to vital healthcare, legal recognition and community protection from transphobic violence) has stalled throughout most of the world not because trans people are relegated to the extreme margins, but because we have become a fetishistic object for cis fears about societal collapse. The British media now engages politicians to speculate about trans women's genitalia with the likes of Wes Streeting former Head of Education at Stonewall and current Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care proudly proclaiming that women cannot have a penis. (This foreshadows what trans people can expect even were a Labour government in the offing.)

The Gender Critical movement in the

UK, borrowing transphobic ideas from currents of radical feminism as well as conservative Catholic reactionaries, coalesced around Theresa May's planned reform to the Gender Recognition Act to grant improved access to Gender Recognition Certificates, humanizing and demedicalising the process. (Although likely retaining significant and brutal checks, and completely excluding nonbinary people.) These minor changes with no consequences for cis people, were cynically conflated with long existing rights enshrined in the Equality Act that protects trans people from discrimination and gives them access to gender specific spaces congruent with their gender identities.

This has given rise to a phoney debate about single-sex spaces, amounting to a fascist wedge against the oppressed, bolstered by false claims to represent cis women's and LGB anxieties with no evidentiary polling basis. Politicians and journalists now glibly speculate about trans women's genitals and misrepresent language intended to include trans men as a concession to trans women's "delusions"—or, in the pretentious language of noted transphobic academic Kathleen Stock, "immersive fictions". In this context the relative invisibility of trans men is deeply interwoven in the weaponised hyper-visibility of trans women and transfeminine people.

Meanwhile, transphobic hate crimes have quadrupled during a pandemic that already renders queer people especially vulnerable, often bereft of vital familial support needed to traverse this social catastrophe. Denied services, publicly attacked and

maligned, discriminated against in work, all LGBTQIA+ people near disaster as the cost-of-living crisis again impacts us doubly: first, as generally more financially precarious, and second, as scapegoats for inevitable mass discontent.

The kind of visibility trans people have received, then, is harmful. But a deeper invisibility, the one to which Crandall was responding, remains in place. Our humanity remains tragically invisible. We are the subject of a debate, material for clickbait throughout the press from the BBC and Guardian to the Times and Telegraph. Every major party (the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Nationalist Party) has been embroiled in transphobia, with the Tories easily being worst and the SNP performing better, but nobody coming out well. In all of this, our lives and struggles and complexities are rendered null.

Before Streeting sat opposite arch-reactionary and transphobe Julia Hartley-Brewer to deny trans humanity, he congratulated a conservative MP for coming out as trans and discussing gender dysphoria. The disconnect here is exemplary. Real human beings are not seen at all in this culture war, we are mill for the grist. The selfsame person can express compassion for us one moment, and contribute to our demonization an entire fifteen minutes later! The cognitive dissonance sees that 'trans issues' are separated from real trans people, as interlocutors on all sides (but rarely trans people themselves) are given immense platforms to discuss us as an

abstracted problem.

Instead of visibility, trans people want support. The living solidarity needed to secure healthcare and to be allowed about society without constant harassment or worse. We need a Trans Day of Action. Not merely our own, because we cannot win this fight alone. Trans people routinely donate to one another's Go Fund Me pages to raise enough to seek private treatment for dysphoria; we regularly create online spaces, on an internet utterly hostile to us, to nurture our shared trans consciousness and allow one another to flourish; we often attend protest after protest to demand liberation from the systems of domination that renders our existences living hell.

We need cis people to commit to taking some of this burden in the

coming years. We need more unions to care enough to show up to our protests (during a recent trans pride, many unions opted to attend another generalised left protest that had no demands, no unified message and no reason to exist whatsoever). We need the prejudice of transphobia to be addressed in all liberatory organisations and called out in workplaces, education, political parties and everywhere else.

After these conditions are met, we will be enabled to be visible in all of our diverse humanity, not only as trans men, trans women, and nonbinary people, but as human beings. But until the particularities of our social condition are thereby addressed, our general place in a universal humanity, and therefore humanity as such, is impossible. This diminishes not only

us, but everyone. It also creates an example of reactionary triumph that inevitably jeopardizes the wider unity of the exploited and the oppressed, and therefore the entire socialist project.

Solidarity is a means and an end for socialism, every part of our humanity that comes under sustained assault draws in ever more of our humanity to resist, and to transform defensive struggles into a fight for our full emancipation in the abolition of the social forces of class society that deny us freedom. In this struggle, to give ground at all, to fail to defend the smallest group, is to encourage inhumanity to its final victory, what Marx insightfully called the common ruin of the contending classes. Solidarity is the only alternative.

Source: *Anti*Capitalist Resistance*.