

# **Hands Off Ukraine!**

*Revolutionary Democracy*

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 the Russian state led by Vladimir Putin began the war against Ukraine. Russia is a country of monopoly capitalism and imperialism. It is linked to social imperialist China which is an ally of Russia. Ukraine is a dependent country allied to United States, the EU, UK imperialism and NATO. The US and its allies through Ukraine are engaged in a proxy war against their Russian rivals, using neo-Nazi forces such as the Azov battalion. The occupation of parts of Ukraine and the ongoing war demand condemnation of Russia, and the defence of the right of self-determination of the Ukrainian nation.

Russia fulfils the features of imperialism; monopoly capitalism is highly concentrated, capital export is substantial, the merger of trust and banks means that finance capital exists which is exported to the dependent countries. Politically, Russian imperialism has been evident in its foreign policy. Russia intervened in Libya after the removal of Gaddafi; it participated in the war in Syria, building air and naval bases in that country; it is active in the Central African Republic and Mali. Russia gave its support for western sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the Security Council of the UN. In 1999 the Ulyanovsk-Vostochny Airport was permitted to be used by NATO for sending transit materials to Afghanistan. Later in March 21, 2012, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin announced that the centre would be used for air transportation by NATO aircraft of certain cargoes to Iraq and Afghanistan. The cordial relations of Putin with Le Pen, Orban and Trump are not unknown.

In what is called the Russian "near abroad" imperialist impact has been observed in South Ossetia, Abkhazia; from Moldova Transnistria was broken away, and a military base established there; Belarus, Kazakhstan, and also the Donbas 'People's Republics' established in Ukraine. In all these countries and regions the Russian paramilitary network of mercenaries, known as the Wagner Group, considered to be close to Putin, has played an active role. The invasion of Ukraine is an integral part of Russian imperialism.

US and German imperialism after the break-up of the Soviet Union exerted to expand their influence in central and eastern Europe. They jointly through NATO annexed the German Democratic Republic, smashed multinational Yugoslavia, broke Czechoslovakia in two, and incorporated some 14 new states into NATO. At the same time US imperialism has sought to subordinate German imperialism which over decades has forged economic ties with Russia. It is clear that the US, led by Biden, has acted in continuation of the aggressive policies of Clinton, in following a policy of confrontation with Russia.

Through the Maidan events of 2014 the elected pro-Russian leader Yanukovich was removed by a coup and replaced by the pro-US Yatsenyuk. Following from this, western economic interests were expanded at the expense of the Russian oligarchs, particularly in investments. The US edged out the interests of Russia and the Russian national minority. In response to the Maidan

coup, for security concerns, Russian capital annexed Crimea, which had been part of Ukraine since 1954. The Minsk agreements of 2014 and 2015 which would have given Donetsk and Lugansk autonomy under a federal Ukraine were not honoured. The second agreement had been brokered by France and Germany. It was argued by the Ukrainians that autonomy could only be granted once Russian troops were withdrawn from eastern Ukraine

Historically Donbas and Lugansk have been Ukrainian areas. The 1897 census shows that Russians comprised just 18% of the population of these two regions. The Soviet Union under Stalin established Union Republics on the basis of areas of linguistic affinity, and this was also the case in Soviet Ukraine. The territorial integrity of Ukraine coming down from Soviet times continued when it became an independent republic in 1991. In eastern Ukraine due to industrialisation under tsarism and Soviet power the percentage of the Russian population rose, declining after the end of the Soviet Union. In 2001 the Russian population of the Lugansk region was 39%, and 38% in the Donetsk region. The Ukrainians of the Donbas region also speak Russian. This has led the Russian state to claim that residents of the Donbass are Russian which is not the case. (It is as though Catalonia was regarded as Spanish as most of the people of Catalonia also speak Spanish in addition to Catalanian.) Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev the russification of Ukraine was initiated. Under the latter leader a fictional 'Soviet nation' was sought to be created to replace the multi-national Soviet Union. The statistics do nonetheless suggest that Russians clearly formed a substantial minority in these two regions after the formation of independent Ukraine. Their rights were not respected. After 2014 they were a target of the Azov Battalion which led to many deaths.

In Lugansk and Donetsk, the Russian minority came to rely on the Russian state in order to counteract the attempts of the Ukrainian state to reclaim its influence and authority in the Donbas area of the Ukraine. Russian capital set up 'People's Republics' in a section of the Donbas. Russian passports were given to sections of the people in the occupied Donbas. Ukrainians retained their Ukrainian passports. The 'communist movement' gave its support to Russia even though the Russian military maintained its firm overall control. The elimination of communist commanders such as Alexei Mozgovoy, who genuinely wished to build people's power in eastern Ukraine, jointly benefitted capital in Russia and Ukraine. The Russian state did not permit communists to stand for elections in Donetsk in November 2014 while in Lugansk no party was permitted to engage in political activity under conditions of martial law.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was directly preceded by a talk by Putin in which he attacked Lenin and Stalin and the Bolsheviks for their nationality policy which had, distinct from the Russians, created the state of Ukraine. Putin argued that there exists a common Russian nation which includes the Ukrainians (Little Russians), Belarussians (White Russians) and the Great Russians. Putin denied that Ukraine ever existed as a separate nation and blamed the Bolsheviks for creating it. Lenin had severed 'Russian land' and created the state of Ukraine.

This corresponds to extreme right wing and fascist thought in Russia which has long demanded the annexation of large chunks of Ukraine.

Stalin had defined a nation in the following manner: “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” It was a definition which was accepted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The different languages which emerged from ancient Rus imply the existence of three nations: the Russians, the Ukrainians and the Belarussians

Lenin had advocated the formation of the Soviet Ukrainian state as correctly pointed out by Putin. It would be part of a voluntary union of republics based on the right of self-determination, This was the foundational basis for the establishment of the Soviet Union. .After the Great Patriotic War, under Stalin parts of western Ukraine were added to the Soviet Union which had historically been a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and had later been occupied by Poland after the first world war. At the same time the unity of the Ukrainian national territories was completed by the addition of Carpathian Ukraine.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which supports the war on Ukraine, was not to be left behind in the attack on the nationality policy of Lenin and Stalin. The CPRF argues that six industrial regions of Russia which had never been part of Ukraine, including Lugansk and Donetsk, were added to Ukraine by Lenin. (Vyacheslav Tetekin, What is Happening in Ukraine? *New Worker*, No. 2152, London, pp. 5-6.) This is incorrect as the census statistics between 1897 to 2001 do not bear this out .

Maxim Latur argued:

“At the end of the 19th century (1897 census), Ukrainians dominated on the territory of modern Donetsk and Lugansk regions (Ekaterinoslav and part of Kharkov provinces). Russians made up 18%. Thus, the assignment of the south-eastern regions of Ukraine to the "primordially Russian territories" looks extremely doubtful. From a *de jure* point of view, for almost 100 years, the territories have belonged to Ukraine, both as part of the Ukrainian SSR and as part of an independent republic. So *de facto* – the territory was initially dominated by the Ukrainian-speaking population, and the Russians were only the second ethnic group” (M. Latur, Minsk anti-war resolution, Novorossiia, Russia-Ukraine 2014, Social statistics, Ukraine). In: <http://left.by/archives/3035>. Translated from the Russian.) (These statistics are corroborated in eds. Klaus Bachman and Igor Lyubashenko, *The Maidan Uprising, Separatism and Foreign Intervention*, in the article by Adam Balcer, ‘Borders Within Borderland: The cultural and ethnic diversity of Ukraine’, Frankfurt am Main, 2014, pp. 87-118.)

In contrast to Putin, Lenin and Stalin accepted that there existed a Ukrainian nation: Lenin was of the view:

“He who justifies the capitalists who “are leading us into war in order to throttle Poland and the Ukraine,... (e.g. calls the throttling of Poland and the Ukraine a ‘defence of the fatherland’ of the Great Russians)... is a lickspittle and a boor, who arouses a legitimate feeling of indignation, contempt, and loathing”. (“On the National Pride of the Great Russians”, Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 104 *et passim*)

Lenin continued:

"The independence of the Ukraine has been recognized both by the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic) and by the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). It is therefore self-evident and generally recognised that only the Ukrainian workers and peasants themselves can and will decide at their All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets whether the Ukraine shall amalgamate with Russia, or whether she shall remain a separate and independent republic, and, in the latter case, what federal ties shall be established between that republic and Russia." ("Letter to the Workers and Peasants of the Ukraine Apropos of the Victories Over Denikin", Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, pp. 292 and 295)

And Stalin averred:

“And only recently it was said that the Ukrainian Republic and the Ukrainian nation were inventions of the Germans. It is obvious, however, that there is a Ukrainian nation, and it is the duty of the Communists to develop its culture. You cannot go against history. It is obvious that although Russian elements still predominate in the Ukrainian towns, in the course of time these towns will inevitably be Ukrainianised.” (Stalin, *Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 48-9)

The rise of the Russian language in eastern Ukraine came about with industrialisation under Tsarism and the Soviet Union which developed the enormous iron ore and coal deposits in this region as well as the metallurgical industry. The Donbass was the premier industrial base of the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union until the second industrial base of the Soviet Union was constructed beyond the Urals in Magnitogorsk in the Stalin period.

What is the character of the ongoing war? At one level the war is an inter-imperialist war involving on the one side the US, the UK, the EU and NATO and on the other side, Russian imperialism. At the other level, the war, after the Russian military assault on the sovereign nation of Ukraine, is a national war of the Ukrainian people against Russian imperialism. Democratic forces cannot support the right-wing regimes of these two countries. In the case of Ukraine the state is dependent on western capitalism, and has promoted neo-Nazism. In the instance of Russian imperialism, the State under Putin operates within the confines of Russian reactionary, Fascist philosophers such as Ivan Ilyin and Alexander Dugin. Putin further has the support of the Khrushchevite Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Putin thus is supported by both ‘communists’ and fascists in Russia.

It is important to give solidarity to the forces opposing the Putin war in Russia in practical ways. It is necessary to support the Russian communists who have taken internationalist positions against Russian imperialism in the course of the invasion of Ukraine. They correctly point out: “States that are in the vanguard of anti-communism cannot carry out any "denazification". States that are confidently following the path of establishing an open terrorist dictatorship over the working people, suppressing social progress and even bourgeois democracy, are not and cannot be ‘antifascist.’ Their policy is directly opposite to the policy of anti-fascism”. (Statement of the United Communist Party – Internationalists)

In Ukraine, despite the reactionary regime, there is ongoing national resistance to the Russian invasion. Unity of the working class, peasantry and working people is a categorical political imperative in order to form a democratic national united front against imperialism. Only a genuine national front which opposes the reactionary forces of imperialism and local reaction can take the Ukrainian nation forward to freedom.

**Hands off Ukraine!**

**Stop the war!**

**Down with the imperialism of the US, UK, EU, NATO and Russia!**

**Long the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian democratic forces!**

**Russian imperialism to pay reparations to Ukraine!**