

Is the War in Ukraine Only an Inter-Imperialist between the USA and Russia or Is It Also a National-Liberation War of the Ukrainian People?

Revolutionary Alliance of Labour of Serbia
savezrada.org
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We are witnessing that the modern revisionists and parts of the Left are taking a pro-war, social-imperialist and social-chauvinist stand on the war in Ukraine, or, “in better cases”, the social-pacifist stand that is presented as opposition to the imperialist war, that they are “not choosing sides”, but are calling for “peace” and are playing naive. This “neutral” and “pacifist” stand is trying to avoid to take a firm revolutionary anti-imperialist position and is actually just an appendix to a pro-war imperialist stand.

The core of this question lies in the characterization of the present war in Ukraine and in general the approach towards imperialist war, which from a Leninist perspective is to be changed in character on the course of the revolutionary people’s struggle.

Are imperialist “superpowers” Gods, or is it the might that lies in the revolutionary people’s struggle that can change the world?

Let us look at characterizations of the First and the Second World War by Lenin and Stalin:

“The conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan, one that follows from the experience of the Commune... it has been dictated by all the conditions of an imperialist war between highly developed bourgeois countries.”

– Berne Conference of the Bolsheviks, February 1915

“In the present war the national element is represented only by Serbia’s war against Austria (which, by the way, was noted in the resolution of our Party’s Berne Conference). It is only in Serbia and among the Serbs that we can find a national-liberation movement of long standing, embracing millions, “the masses of the people”, a movement of which the present war of Serbia against Austria is a “continuation”. If this war were an isolated one, i.e., if it were not connected with the general European war, with the selfish and predatory aims of Britain, Russia, etc., it would have been the duty of all socialists to desire the success of the Serbian bourgeoisie as this is the only correct and absolutely inevitable conclusion to be drawn from the national element in the present war...

*“...A sudden change in the mood of the masses is not only possible, but is becoming more and more probable... We cannot tell whether a powerful revolutionary movement will develop immediately after this war, or during it, etc., but at all events, it is only work in this direction that deserves the name of socialist work. **The slogan of a civil war** is the one that summarises and directs this work...”*

– Lenin, The Collapse of the Second International, June 1915

“A distinguishing feature of the second imperialist war is that so far it is being waged and extended by the aggressor powers, while the other powers, the “democratic” powers, against whom in fact the war is directed, pretend that it does not concern them, wash their hands of it, draw back, boast of their love of peace, scold the fascist aggressors, and... surrender their positions to the aggressors bit by bit, at the same time asserting that they are preparing to resist.

“This war, it will be seen, is of a rather strange and one-sided character. But that does not prevent it from being a brutal war of unmitigated conquest waged at the expense of the poorly defended peoples of Ethiopia, Spain and China.”

– History of the C.P.S.U.(b) (Short Course), 1939

“We do not approve of German expansion in the Balkans. But that does not mean that we are deviating from the pact with Germany and veering toward England.”

– Zhdanov and Dimitrov, April 1941 (Dimitrov’s Diary)

“The war of the Greek and Yugoslav people against imperialist aggression is a just war, there are no reservations.”

– Stalin to Zhdanov, April 1941 (Dimitrov’s Diary)

“It would be wrong to think that the Second World War was a casual occurrence or the result of mistakes of any particular statesmen, though mistakes undoubtedly were made. Actually, the war was the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism. Marxists have declared more than once that the capitalist system of world economy harbors elements of general’s crises and armed conflicts and that, hence, the development of capitalism in our time proceeds not in the form of smooth, and even progress but through crises and military catastrophe.

The fact is that the unevenness of development of the capitalist countries usually leads in time to violent disturbance of equilibrium in the world system of capitalism. That group of capitalist countries which considers itself worse provided than others with raw materials and markets usually makes attempts to alter the situation and to repartition the “spheres of influence” in its favor by armed force. The result is a splitting of the capitalist world into two hostile camps and war between them.

Perhaps military catastrophes might be avoided if it were possible for raw materials and markets to be periodically redistributed among the various countries in accordance with their economic importance, by agreement and peaceable settlement. But that is impossible to do under present capitalist conditions of the development of world economy.

Thus the First World War (1914-18) was the result of the first crisis of the capitalist system of world economy, and the Second World War (1939-45) was the result of a second crisis.

That does not mean of course that the Second World War is a copy of the first. On the contrary, the Second World War differs materially from the first in character. It must be borne in mind that before attacking the Allied countries the principal fascist states—Germany, Japan, and Italy—destroyed the last vestiges of bourgeois-democratic liberties at home, established a brutal terrorist regime in their own countries, rode roughshod over the principles of sovereignty and free development of small countries, proclaimed a policy of seizure of alien territories as their own policy, and declared for all to hear that they were out for world domination and the establishment of a fascist regime throughout the world.

Moreover, by the seizure of Czechoslovakia and of the central areas of China, the Axis states showed that they were prepared to carry out their threat of enslaving all freedom-loving nations. In view of this, unlike the First World War, the Second World War against the Axis states from the very outset assumed the character of an anti-fascist war, a war of liberation, one aim of which was also the restoration of democratic liberties. The entry of the Soviet Union into the war against the Axis states could only enhance, and indeed did enhance, the anti-fascist and liberation character of the Second World War...”

– Stalin, Origin and the Character of the Second World War, February 1946

From the writings of Lenin and Stalin, we can see that saying the war is inter-imperialist is not the same as the politics of “non-interference”.

It is in the aggressor’s best interest to picture the present war in Ukraine as a war of Russia with NATO. Actually, this is what the Putinists propagate. They do not recognize the right of a sovereign nation to exist, nor the struggle of its people to defend it.

What is more, this “non-interference” position actually does not see the imperialist character of the coming war from the Marxist position of the general world capitalist crisis, but is actually influenced by reactionary “geopolitical” theories, in which the main actors of history are the superpowers and not the peoples. This position is scared of the “superpowers” as of almighty Gods. It serves to hide in the bush, to wash the Pilate’s hands and not do anything against aggressive powers, and

thus help the imperialist warmongers and imperialist war. Instead of the resolute and dialectical Leninist slogan “turn imperialist war into a civil war”, these social-pacifists give empty reformist phrases such as: “No war between nations, no peace between classes” (as if any of this is possible in capitalist world). This is their cover for passivity and cowardness, for a "left-wing" appendage to the imperialist aggressors. This position, if we not fight to unmask it, can put communists not on the forefront, but only on the slopy tail of historical developments.

It is why we fight the modern Kautskyian, revisionist and actually pro-imperialist position that is predominating, and make the efforts that the Leninist, revolutionary position on the present war in Ukraine be more clearly shaped among Marxists-Leninists. In this sense, we are presenting the revolutionary anti-war platform that we outlined for the proposition of the anti-war movement in Serbia and in the Balkans...

Stop the war in Ukraine (platform against the war)

STOP THE WAR IN UKRAINE – RUSSIAN OCCUPIERS, GET OUT! NATO AND PUTIN ARE NOT FACTORS OF PEACE AND FREEDOM, BUT OF FASCISM AND WAR!

1. We condemn the Russian imperialist invasion of the sovereign country of Ukraine and the homes of Ukrainian people and families. The Ukrainian people, like all nations in the world, have the right to "exist" (which the Great Russian chauvinists and aggressors openly and loudly question), have the right to self-determination, as well as the right to defend their homeland from the occupiers. We demand the urgent withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. We stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian working people, who are fighting with a rifle in hand, as well as with all Ukrainian refugees who have been forced to leave their homes.

2. Although the war in Ukraine is part of the general inter-imperialist struggle between NATO countries and Putin's Russia in Eastern Europe, it is at the same time a national-liberation war of the Ukrainian people to defend their country and homes from the Great-Russian occupiers. Ukraine is not fighting with the Russian occupiers over some imperialist “sphere of influences” but to defend its own country. Actually, the national-liberation war of the Ukrainian people is reducing the danger of the general inter-imperialist war and is a factor of world peace. To the degree that the Putinist occupiers are driven away from Kiev, to that degree is the world far from the nuclear military catastrophe.

We believe that the struggle of the armed Ukrainian people in the liberation war, which stands in the middle of imperialist plans, is a brave and impressive example to all nations of the world in today's historical conditions - that it is possible to resist the imperialist nuclear “superpowers”, which push the world into a new general imperialist war and militaristic catastrophe, and to spoil their vicious plans. The resistance of the generally armed people once again shows that "all imperialists are paper tigers!"

While we unconditionally support the national liberation war of the Ukrainian people against Putin's Great Russian occupiers, we also support the isolation of sectarian chauvinist elements and other imperialist agencies in the Ukrainian national liberation movement, which are imposing the course of its development. Such elements can only compromise the just struggle of the Ukrainian people for liberation from the Russian White Guards, morally strengthen the illegal Russian invasion, push

Ukraine even more into the arms of Western imperialists and thus, finally, threaten any Ukrainian sovereignty and independence...

We call on the international working class movement and the peoples of the world to fulfil their internationalist duty and support the national liberation struggle waged by the armed Ukrainian working people, and thus significantly help them isolate anti-people's and treacherous elements who seek their chance in the chaos of war.

3. We support *the friendship of the people* and condemn the attempts of Russian chauvinists to present their invasion as a fratricidal struggle between Russians and Ukrainians, using for these purposes the so-called "People's Republics" in Donbas. Ukrainians and Russians together and unitedly are resisting the Great Russian imperialists in defence of their homeland, Ukraine. The Russian people are fighting on the streets of Russia in support of their Ukrainian brothers. Putin's crude propaganda, although he does not try too hard to hide his imperial goals, is also trying to use the red flag of victory over fascism to justify his invasion. In the words of Alexander Batov, a representative of the Russian United Front of Labour (Rot Front): there is no more insolent provocation than that! Vlasov's white army is trying to enter Kiev, not the red one!

It is no coincidence that in his speech that prepared the attack on Ukraine, Putin attacked Lenin and Stalin in a revisionist manner, as symbols of principled national policy and the right of peoples to self-determination, using theses from Khrushchev's "secret speech". The logic of the development of the new Russian Pinochetist and now monopolistic bourgeoisie, which after the collapse of the USSR, like interwar Germany, found itself humiliated in order to rise with the investments of Western monopoly capital – leads to the renewal of old tsarist, Cadet and Menshevik imperialist and revisionist social-imperialist ambitions, in rising ambitions for redistribution of the world and world markets. The flags of the USSR on Putin's tanks in Ukraine with the infamous semi-swastika "Z" do not represent Lenin-Stalin's anti-imperialism and anti-fascism, but the traditions of Khrushchev-Brezhnev-type social-imperialism, i.e. neo-tsarism.

4. We condemn the policies of all imperialist "superpowers", which are pushing the world into a new general imperialist war. We condemn NATO's imperialist military alliance, as aggressive as Putin's imperialist war machine – which has dared to threaten a world nuclear war. We condemn the hypocritical imperialist policy of NATO and the EU, which, on the backs of the Ukrainian people and the peoples of Europe and the world in general, are making their own imperialist plans for their Russian, Chinese and other imperialist rivals. We condemn the false portrayal of NATO and EU imperialists and monopolists as defenders of "democracy" and "national independence", as well as the cynical portrayal of Putin's imperialists as "anti-fascists" and "anti-imperialists". We believe that monopolists-imperialists from the west and the east cannot have any "liberating" role, that they are not mutual ideological enemies as they try to present themselves and thus try to deceive the peoples to support them in the imperialist wars of conquest. This is not a war for "liberation", but for a new division of the world and world markets. We stand in solidarity with the Russian anti-war movement, the rebellion of the Russian people and all imprisoned anti-war activists in Russia. We also stand in solidarity with all sincere and consistent anti-imperialists in Western countries. "A nation that oppresses another nation is forging its own chains."

5. We stand for the complete economic, political, military and national independence of Serbia, as well as all Balkan countries, from the imperialist powers. We are fighting against Serbia's accession to NATO and the EU; against the domination of Western, Russian and Chinese monopoly capital in our country, as well as the severance of any military-political ties with the imperialists of the East and the West, the enemies of the peoples of the Balkans and the world. We support all consistent anti-imperialist movements in the Balkans. We call for a revolutionary alliance of the Balkan peoples and a joint international struggle against the capitalist crisis, fascism and imperialist war.

6. In addition to clearly refusing to join the camp of social chauvinists and liberal nationalists who side with Russian or Western imperialist powers, we also refuse to join the camp of social pacifists and liberal pacifists as their appendage. Pacifist slogans and appeals to the imperialists to stop the war can only accelerate the preparation of a new inter-imperialist war, the only logical result of the general capitalist crisis, and lull the peoples toward the revolutionary tasks that await them. Only the overthrow of the power of the imperialists and the instigators of war can stop the coming imperialist war and bloodshed among nations. Instead of pacifist slogans, we call on the working class and the peoples of the Balkans, Europe and the world to fight the war with strikes and demonstrations and take the Lenin's slogan and prepare *to turn the imperialist war into a revolutionary one*.

7. We refuse to pay for the crisis and die in the imperialist war to save the rotten corpse of capitalism. We believe that the black clouds of the general imperialist war looming over us are an expression not of the "geopolitical" crisis between the USA and Russia, but of the capitalist crisis in both USA and Russia and the rest of the capitalist world. This crisis is not only of economic, not only political, not only health and social, but a general world capitalist crisis, which primarily threatens the working class but also other working and non-monopoly urban and rural layers of the people.

We believe that only a united working class can gather and lead the people in a consistent and complete liberation struggle, reverse the course of the crisis and save the country from social and national catastrophe. We are fighting for the unity of the working class and the gathering around it of a broad popular front against the capitalist crisis, fascism and war – against the state power of the instigators of war and imperialist and chauvinist agents in our country and in the Balkans.

Independence, democracy, socialism!

Not with Putin, not with NATO, not with the EU! Against submission to the imperialists!

Fight against the imperialist occupiers, instigators of war and their criminal policies!

All to the people's front against the capitalist crisis, fascism and imperialist war!

Balkan resistance movement!
Revolutionary Alliance of Labour¹

¹ A platform presented at a meeting of nominally anti-war organizations in Belgrade, March 13, 2022