

Contribution on the Ukrainian question – WIN conference on September 9 and 10, 2023.

Our contribution to the debate at this WIN conference is a headache: in fact, more than eighteen months after the outbreak of the war of invasion by Vladimir Putin against Ukraine and its people, comrade Roger takes up the elements of language distilled by the propaganda services of the Russian state. In these conditions, how can we have a debate that does not turn into a boxing match in a quarter of an hour?

Roger has a crucial responsibility in the positioning of WIN through his status as a veteran and leader within the revolutionary movement since the 1960s and as one of the main initiators and animators of WIN. In addition, Roger has an undeniable reputation and audience within the Labour left in the UK and internationally.

This is why we are sorry to see its current positioning. Certainly, he accompanies with general internationalist remarks the negative arguments towards the nation and the Ukrainian people, towards its fight for its independence, for its freedom.

But in this case, the display of principles of internationalist fraternity between workers falls flat if there is no prior recognition of the different status of the two states.

On the one hand, the current Russian State, the assumed continuation of the Russian Empire, in the lineage of the Tsars and Stalin, that is to say the imperialist State, colonizer, oppressor, aggressor of the Ukrainian people. This Russian state is also the oppressor and colonizer within the borders of the Russian Federation of many small peoples colonized since the dawn of Tsarist times (Tchéutchènes, Bachkirs, Bouriates, Kalmuks, Sakhas, Abkhazes, Ossètes ...). These small peoples have the fiction of autonomous political institutions but suffer the bloody burden of mass conscription when Putin organizes roundups of their entire male population to wage his war.

On the other side: a nation that has fought for centuries for its independence from Muscovy and which between 1917 and 1921 experienced its own revolution alongside the Russian revolution. A people who have known the murderous effects of Stalinism with in particular the mass genocide of 1932-33 entered in history under the name of Holodomor.

It should be noted in passing that one of the destructive effects of comparable importance to the Holodomor is the extermination of the entire militant generation that had made the revolution of 1917-1921. These two facts [the mass genocide and the physical liquidation of the labour movement, in particular the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, of which Roman Rodolsky was a member, during the purges of the years 34-38 which destroyed the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky] created the conditions for the emergence of Banderism, an ethnic nationalism of fascist inspiration. Banderism is an offshoot of Stalinism.

Between colonizer and colonized, there is no equality. This is the basics that Lenin revealed on the rights of oppressed nationalities in the controversies provoked by the world war between 1914 and 1917. Lenin taught that the workers of the imperialist and colonizing state had a duty of solidarity towards the peoples colonized by their state and their bourgeoisie.

Between 1921 and 1923, in debates within the Bolshevik Party, Lenin took a clear stand for the rights to independence and sovereignty of Ukraine. The Ukrainian question then weighed in the direction of the creation of the USSR, that is to say a free Union of sovereign Soviet Republics.

Stalin supported the creation of an equivalent of the current Russian Federation where the colonized peoples of the Tsarist empire would have remained in the same situation as before 1917. And we have since known how much Putin loathes/execrates Lenin as 'the creator of 'Ukraine'.

The bureaucratization of the first workers' state who have survived longer than the Paris Commune of 1871 or the Helsinki Commune of 1918 led to an internal counter-revolution which led to the resurgence of national oppression comparable or even worse than that of Tsarism epoch, with mass deportations against entire peoples (Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Chechens, Balts, Poles, Ukrainians, etc.), with extermination policies like the Holodomor, or the resumption of anti-Semitism, which did not disappear with the death of Stalin in 1953.

At the end of the 1930s, in several important texts, Trotsky took up this Bolshevik heritage by reaffirming the right to self-determination and independence for the Ukrainian nation. And he linked that issue with the question of overthrow of stalinism by what he labeled as political revolution.

And in 2023, why should all this go by the wayside? Should the rights of peoples, that is to say democracy applied to national groups, give way to superior interests? But what higher interests?

All the talk of dismissing the Ukrainian camp and the Russian invader back to back, or worse describing a "war waged by NATO and the EU against Russia" has a terrible consequence: it enacts an absolute ban on to revolt, to rise up, to mobilize, to defend themselves for the workers and the peoples having the misfortune to find themselves in one of the so-called "anti-imperialist" countries or more broadly those of the BRICS. This orientation has directly counter-revolutionary consequences in the conditions of today's world, the multipolar world.

The former hegemonic imperialism of the years 1945-2000, the USA, is in decline, even if it remains number 1. It is in increasing competition with former accomplices (the countries of the European Union) as well as with emerging powers that have acquired considerable economic and demographic weight, on a global scale (China, India) and a myriad of states, some of which are associated within the BRICS. Note: BRICS do not form an absolutely and unwaveringly united bloc. And many alliances can be constantly recomposed until the outbreak of open inter-imperialist conflicts. Before 1914, diplomatic and military alliances were changing and fluctuating until the outbreak of war!

Immediately, this orientation prohibits the workers and the peoples of all the rival states of the USA from seeking to overthrow their bourgeoisie. Even in Western Europe!

We draw the attention of comrades to the implications of their immediate position on Ukraine.

A step-by-step response to Roger's text on Ukraine would require a book of at least 500 pages to deliver:

- all historical developments from the establishment of K'yiv and Moscow in the Middle Ages to the end of the USSR;
- the reminder of the nature of the Ukrainian national movement from the end of the 19th century until

the Ukrainian revolution of 1917-1921, the place and leading role of the Ukrainian socialist and Marxist parties in this history. A story that both Putin and those nostalgic for Bandera do not want to see reappear.

- the facts since 1991 and Ukraine's accession to independence;
- the reality of political developments since the "Orange Revolution" of 2004 and the Maidan of 2014.

What we regret is the lack of interest in the uprising of the Ukrainian people from February 24, 2022 when the self-organized mobilization of broad layers of society enabled the failure of the initial offensive of Putin. This uprising can be compared to what happened in Spain in 1936 when the masses confronted Franco's putschists with their bare hands, because of the practical and political disarmament resulting from the policy of the Popular Front government, or during the insurgencies of the Liberation in France, Italy, Yugoslavia or Greece in 1944-45.

On February 24, 2022, Jo Biden offered Zelensky a taxi to flee for exile. The Ukrainians responded through their acts of resistance that they did not want to become the serfs of the new Tsar again, possibly assisted by local oligarchs with a national conscience indexed to the state of their bank accounts.

As an oppressed and colonized nation, threatened with genocide, Ukraine has an unconditional right to defense and therefore to arm against the historic imperial power currently embodied by the regime of Vladimir Putin.

Today there is a choice to make: to support Ukrainian workers against the imperialist and genocidal aggressor and against the anti-social effects of the present neo-liberal government of Ukraine. The condition for the full and complete development of the labour movement as well as that of other social movements (feminists, ecologists, LGBT, students, etc.) requires the guarantee of the national freedom of this people. No democratic freedoms, no social progress without national liberation!

In Aplutsoc, through our activities within RESU/ENSU, through our support for union solidarity convoys, we have the honor of meeting and exchanging with activists of the Ukrainian left, from Sotsialnyi Rukh to anarchists, feminists, student activists, industrial trade unionists. We invite the comrades present today to engage in these solidarity activities.

The practical minimum of this choice focuses on the demand for the immediate withdrawal of Putin's army from the entire territory of Ukraine. This is where it all has to start!

OD, 09-09-2023.