
NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR

LIVERPOOL

Against Fake Internationalism

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has spread confusion within the ranks of the capitalist left. Some have sided with the Ukrainian resistance, others have blamed it all on NATO, and many have simply remained silent. Whatever the pretence, none of these positions have anything in common with internationalism as we know it.

“Arm Ukraine Now”: A Call for War

A slogan commonly heard at supposedly anti-war demonstrations in Europe and the USA is “Arm Ukraine Now”. The premise being that Russia being the aggressor, Ukraine needs all the military support it can get to defend itself. It is a popular position not least because it is openly encouraged by the capitalist media in the West. And in fact, arming Ukraine is exactly what NATO countries have been doing, even before the Russian invasion started. The UK government has been keener to send anti-tank missiles, munitions, air defence systems, and other military equipment to Ukraine, than it has been about taking in Ukrainian refugees. The liberals and leftists who argue for sending more arms to Ukraine, even if they genuinely think this will help to end the war, are in reality parroting jingoistic propaganda. Rather than bringing this conflict to an end, both Russia’s aggression and NATO support for Ukraine set up the stage for more generalised war in the near future.

There are others on the left, more discerning about the Ukrainian resistance (which of course also includes the far right), who would like only certain groups to receive donations and equipment. Among the candidates for such support are alleged “anti-authoritarian” formations which pose with anarchist banners... next to Ukrainian national symbols. A cursory glance reveals that these are volunteer units within the Territorial Defence Forces of the Ukrainian state. So, we are not talking here about any autonomous working-class resistance, and any comparisons to the Paris Commune (where a section of the National Guard revolted against their superiors and took over the city) or the Makhnovshchina (which acted directly against the emerging Ukrainian state

and opposed Ukrainian nationalism) are a complete distortion.

“NATO out of Europe”: Letting Russian Imperialism Off the Hook

On the other hand, we have the usual voices from within the Trotskyist, Stalinist and Maoist camps, for whom imperialism, rather than a stage in capitalist development, generally means only the state policy of the USA. Usually when military conflicts break out, they will take the side of whoever happens to oppose the USA. This is of course a position difficult to express in the current war in Ukraine without appearing like a warmonger. So instead, other arguments have been adopted so as not to say the quiet part out loud: Russia has behaved aggressively, but it is not imperialist, it is just reacting to the pressure from NATO. NATO should withdraw from Eastern Europe and then we’ll have peace...

Of course, NATO encirclement of Russia is also part of the background to the war in Ukraine. But we live in a capitalist world, no region is safe from competition between nation-states, and no imperialist powers will simply abandon their spoils of war. Russia’s actions have created an environment which necessitates a response from the NATO backed countries. They cannot sit back as their resources and trade partners face aggression, so more and more weapons and soldiers will pour into the region to protect the needs of Western capital. What’s happening now is a continuation of already existing tendencies – the USA has come out victorious from the two previous imperialist world wars but is now facing a new challenge from China; increasingly Europe is rallying behind the USA and Russia is becoming dependent on China. The lines are being drawn; imperialist line-ups are emerging. This is a battle for world domination, the battleground is everywhere, it is not going away, and no pacifistic appeals to the powers-that-be can solve it.

What “No War but the Class War” Really Means

In 1916, in the midst of the first imperialist world war, one “conscientious objector” imprisoned in Richmond Castle in North Yorkshire wrote on the walls of their cell: “The only war which is worth fighting is the class war. The working class of this country have no quarrel with the working class of Germany or any other country. Socialism stands for internationalism. If the workers of all countries united and refused to fight there would be no war.”

This is the internationalism we see ourselves in the tradition of. It means that, unlike the capitalist left, we do not take the side of any capitalist states, whether

they are deemed “progressive” or “reactionary”, whether they happen to be the “aggressors” or the “attacked”. Our solidarity always lies with the global working class, the victims of war, of sanctions, of austerity, everywhere. Imperialist war, the product of the capitalist system, can only be stopped by our class. We may be cogs in the machine, but without us nothing moves. The ruling classes are taking the world down the darkest of paths. It’s time the working class put forward our alternative: a global cooperative commonwealth without national or class divisions, where the principle “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”, rather than “war of all against all”, rules the day.

We Must Dissent

As we hear more and more from the horrors of war in Ukraine, we cannot help but feel moral indignation at the state of the world. This anger is not misplaced but it is often misdirected. Too often our anger is directed at whole nations; we forget that these nations, however despotic and bigoted their rulers, are not homogeneous entities but consist of a ruling class and a working class made up of people like you and I, people who are not responsible for the actions of their governments and have no part to play in the geopolitical struggle for dominance over resources, except as pawns.

Our own governments and media are part of a capitalist system that has its own geopolitical interests. These interests have nothing to do with us. They have nothing to do with the people of Ukraine or Russia, but they will still spread suffering in our name, just as Russia or Ukraine’s government does. This war has whipped people up into a jingoistic fury spurred by the horrors of war, but like all wars it is about profit, it is about securing pipeline routes, trade deals, access to fertile farmlands. National identity is a myth sold to us to divide us against our fellow workers and to draw lines around valuable resources.

Though we may wish our government did something about the war, whatever it will do will be calculated in its own interests, not for any humanitarianism. We should not simply abide by

our countries’ decision to add fuel to the fires of the capitalist war machine simply because it will ease our own anxiety. There is much to be anxious about but if you want to know what is to be done then you should look to your own class, not to any national identity. It is capitalist interests that create wars over resources, it is national division that fuels hatred, and we should reject both.

We should place our solidarity with the working class in all nations. If or when this conflict ends there will be more to come, more national and ethnic hatreds stoked by the capitalist classes as they squabble for profits and use us as pawns. We can either continue to pick sides in the endless game, flip flopping with impoverished moralism according to the whims of the hypocrites who rule us. Or we can reject their game, fight for ourselves and for the working class everywhere.

What We Are Fighting For

NWBCW Liverpool aims to bring the internationalist message to local struggles. We see ourselves in the tradition of previous attempts to oppose capitalist wars from a working-class perspective. If you broadly agree with what is written in our material, get in touch. We would encourage other internationalists around the world to set up their own NWBCW groups in your workplaces and neighbourhoods.

Twitter: @NWBCWliverpool
Blog: nwbcwliverpool.wordpress.com