

War in Ukraine: reflections and proposals for internationalist union action

Thursday 31 March 2022, by [PIRANI Simon](#) (Date first published: 31 March 2022).

From the [Solidaires Union web site](#). These notes from the Solidaires Union bureau set out its approach to building solidarity with Ukrainian working-class resistance to Russian military aggression. They are a useful starting point for discussion. Please copy and circulate

This statement is based on the assessment made during the *Solidaires* national board meeting in March, the contributions of our member organizations, the work of our international commission, and inter-union exchanges both nationally, through the inter-union *CGT/FSU/Solidaires*, and internationally, through the [International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles](#). All of this has also been fuelled by the exchanges and reflections held within larger unitary frameworks in which we take part. [\[1\]](#)

Beyond producing assessments and analyses, union commitment is about action. The following proposals are based on the international work that *Solidaires* has been doing for years and are expressed in the initiatives, connections and publications of recent days. They aim to respond – on the basis of concrete actions and not useless polemics – to the sectarianism displayed by some statements from other trade union organisations, and especially to the hypocrisy of government and employers’ declarations.

The introductory statement to the debate of the national board the 9th March recalled the position of the *Solidaires* union from the first day of the war (actually even before the start of this war, since all that follows is part of the tradition and practice of internationalist unionism that we try to implement):

□ The immediate withdrawal of Russian troops – the right of peoples to self-determination – the need for an immediate ceasefire and for building a negotiated peace – supporting people fighting against war, especially in countries at war – the dignified and massive reception of all refugees, regardless of their origin, and the fight against all inequalities and discrimination – taking part, on our own terms, in mobilisations and demonstrations for peace – (joint) participation in the initiatives of solidarity with the Ukrainian people, such as the “union convoy” which aims to provide Ukrainian workers with relief supplies – denouncing nationalism and capitalism as the causes of war – internationalism, as an alternative to nationalism – fighting to end tax havens – the urgency of an ecological transition towards the end of the massive use of fossil fuels.

It is Russian power, Putin’s regime, which bears the responsibility for this war. We must start by acknowledging this. **This is, after the annexation of Crimea, a new imperialist military intervention by a dictatorial regime that severely represses (or even crushes) popular movements, including the independent labour movement** (Ukraine, Belarus and, most recently, Kazakhstan).

This acknowledgement does not detract from the fact that we have long been involved in collectives and initiatives calling for the dissolution of NATO. There is no reason to question this commitment, as it is one of our roles as an organisation in a NATO member country. However, the demand to dissolve NATO should not be used as an argument aimed – deliberately or not – at “equalising” responsibilities for what is happening in Ukraine.

For *Solidaires*, the call to “build a negotiated peace” implies that any war can only end – other than by one of the sides being crushed – with a multilateral agreement. However, in discussions in our national board, it appeared to us that such a claim can be understood (and is sometimes used) to blame equally the aggressors and their victims, by asking them to find a “reasonable” solution – whereas the Ukrainian population has been attacked, and are legitimately resisting. So, the national board proposes to abandon this call, until further discussions with the Union authorities can be held at the beginning of April. Indeed, we would not want to endorse Russian military advances. This would be following in the political footsteps of those who once limited themselves to saying “peace in Vietnam” or “peace in Algeria”, thus erasing the resistance of the Vietnamese and Algerian peoples and refusing to support those who resisted the forces of occupation and repression. **For now, regarding this matter, we must support the struggle of the Ukrainian people against the Russian military invasion and abstain from demanding a “negotiated peace” on the basis of a balance of power that would ratify the situation produced by the Russian state’s imperialist aggression, by the military brutality of its actions since 24 February.**

Regarding the Ukrainian government and the political forces present in Ukraine: the Ukrainian government is obviously open to criticism, but it is in no way comparable to a dictatorship. Among the Ukrainian political forces, there certainly are far-right groups. This reinforces **our need to establish direct connections, especially with Ukrainian trade unionists**, but it does not justify any restrictions on our support to the resistance against Russian invasion and occupation. (Far-right forces exist in France, too, and fortunately this has never been a reason for our international partners to break off relations with us). The history of the Resistance in France during the Second World War reminds us of the great diversity of the political affiliations of the people who got involved in it. Reinforcing the labour movement within the resistance is of great importance.

Along with the Ukrainian resistance, opposition to war in Russia is key to the outcome of the situation. Protest movements are contesting or rejecting war, and there is “questioning” going on among Russian soldiers. **Today it is imperative to support the resistance in Ukraine as well as disobedience in Russia.** Indeed, peace and justice in the world will not be achieved if the Ukrainian resistance is crushed and the Putin regime is strengthened by the outcome of the war.

Our aim is neither that of humanitarian organisations, nor that of UN-type institutions, nor that of commentators on international events. While we certainly can draw on various analyses, we cannot limit ourselves to analysing and discussing the insufficiencies of one or another text. Our union’s internationalist activity must be, above all, union activity – which means, taking on its political dimension in full, but on the basis of defending of our class interests, and from an emancipatory perspective. All this might sound somewhat ludicrous in times of war. To make it less ludicrous in this context, we propose some guidelines for our *Solidaires* Union, as follows.



□ First, **supporting the people of Ukraine** who are directly affected by the war and its appalling consequences. Having the means to resist is a vital necessity for them.

□ Second, **supporting the millions of people condemned to exile.** These are two vital imperatives for the local communities, and thus two priorities for our internationalist union

commitment.

□ **Third, supporting (especially through information) those who, in Russia, are opposing the war and the Putin regime.**

We must do all this starting from our realities, through concrete action, here and now. This does not prevent us from taking part in debates and working within other frameworks, but concrete action will be more useful than multiplying declarations appealing to our governments, the European Union or any other institution of the capitalist order which is part of the problem.



□ 1

One of our priorities is to give a voice to unionists from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, etc. We must continue and amplify the work started through the *International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles*. Several [statements, calls and interviews](#) have been published, and we keep on working. Our union organisations have expressed themselves, based on the realities of their professional sectors, and that is important.

We must continue to publicise the words and actions of trade unionists in the countries affected, and to keep expanding our contacts and exchanges. Our daily report, website and our various information channels will be used for this purpose, through a dedicated page.

We intend to hold online meetings with our unionist comrades from the Eastern European region. All this will be done both within the framework of the CGT/FSU/*Solidaires* inter-union and within the *International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles*.

In addition, we will soon publish a text that introduces the union forces in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus.

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□ 2

Regarding refugees, the *Solidaires* Union and several member organisations have been working on this issue for a long time. Faced with the current situation, specific initiatives have been taken, for example, by [SUD-Rail](#) or [SUD Education](#). These both address the current situation and are part of our organisation's fundamental principles. We support "refugees from Ukraine", and not only "refugees of Ukrainian nationality".

Whatever we can achieve for them must serve as leverage to make claims for all refugees. This bears repeating, despite being obvious for all *Solidaires* comrades who have been involved in these struggles for years. In France (and not only France, for sure), governments have been carrying out racist policies for years, thus shaping structural racism. Are things presented as "possible" or "normal" for the majority of refugees from Ukraine? Let's then make sure they are indeed possible for all migrants! Let us repeat it relentlessly. When we speak of refugees, migrants or exiles, we must also speak of the strikes of undocumented workers such as those of *DPD*, *Chronopost* and *RSI* supported by *Solidaires* for months in Ile-de-France. Active support is an effective answer to those who want to sort refugees into different compartments.

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□ 3

Locally, *Solidaires* collectives and activists are involved in initiatives aimed at providing Ukrainians with what they need to live, to survive and to continue resisting Russian state aggression. We can help by publicising these initiatives, by establishing connections with trade unionists from Ukraine, Poland, etc, as we have already begun to do, thanks to the *International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles*. A convoy is shortly leaving Brittany, and some of our comrades from *Solidaires Finistère* have [taken part in the organisation](#); we have helped by establishing contacts in Poland, Romania and Ukraine and by financially supporting the initiative. In several regions, *Solidaires* structures and activists take part in such initiatives; we will do our best to respond to requests, in particular to requests for contacts.

We are starting discussions on organising similar initiatives at both the national and international levels. Two different projects have already been launched:

→ Nationally, an inter-union CGT/FSU/*Solidaires* organisation has been set up, and it is working on [the organisation of a convoy](#), which has also been proposed to other French Unions: CFDT, FO, CFTC, CGC and UNSA. A meeting will be held shortly, to move the project forward.

→ Internationally, the *International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles* is planning and initiative that should take place shortly after the Network meeting on 21-24 April in Dijon. This would allow organisations present in France on that occasion to participate in the initiative, to give it an even more pronounced internationalist character. Our comrades from *CSP-Conlutas* (Brazil) are already up for it, and our comrades from *OZZ IP* (Poland) are already very much involved in current internationalist union work (reception of refugees, links with trade unionists from Ukraine, etc).

Activists from *Solidaires* have experience with the *Convoi Syndical* association, which took action during the wars in Bosnia and Chechnya. Member organisations of *Solidaires* have expressed their willingness to take part in such initiatives. We keep working on these two projects. Regarding the financial aspect, a proposal has been made to launch a call for subscriptions for these convoys and to use our last year's international budget (not spent due to the health situation). This will be discussed at the next national board meeting. To simplify things, we are using the *Convoi Syndical* account.

A [specific note](#) will be produced on this subject, presenting the projects and giving concrete information to subscribe.

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□ 4

Beyond the urgency and the answers that we can try to give, the war in Ukraine also brings us to question again the military-industrial complex, namely: **the sale of arms; the production of arms; the budgets allocated to the military; militarist policies; and wars taking place elsewhere on the planet.** Let's not forget that France was selling arms to Russia, up until 2020. Collective reflection, together with the collectives involved in these issues, is to be resumed, from a trade union perspective. It can only be useful if it includes the union organisations in the sectors most directly concerned.

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□ 5

For the *Solidaires* Union, support for the people of Ukraine and the struggle against this war **should**

not be undertaken to the detriment of our other international causes (Palestine, Kurdistan, Syria, Françafrique, Afghanistan, Chiapas, etc). In this regard we are working on the arrival in France of Afghan activists from Rawa, an association of women fighting for women's and human rights, against the war (since 1977, and thus also against the Soviet occupation), against the Taliban, against the American occupation. We do not lose sight of the fact that the governmental and European actions undertaken today - sanctions, deliveries of arms - are intolerable, particularly with regard to the situation in Palestine, which is confronted with Israel's refusal to apply international law and with the criminalisation of Palestinians who resist and of those who support them. Palestine or Kurdistan... These double standards, as in the case of refugees, reveal the duplicity of those in power.

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□ 6

Within our international commission, a specific work group has been set up: ukraine.solidaires.org. All professional and interprofessional organisations in our Union are welcome to join (as they are welcome to join the international commission, or any other commission!).

Simon Pirani

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P.S.

Translation from French by Elisa Moros for PeopleAndNature.wordpress.com

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<https://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2022/03/31/war-in-ukraine-reflections-and-proposals-for-internationalist-union-action/>

Footnotes

[1] See for example: [Liberty and Democracy for the People of Ukraine](#), published by Syllepse and others, including, notably, [The Utopians](#); the [Collective of Marches for Peace](#), of which Solidaires is a member; the European initiative Stop War in Ukraine, which brings together the union organisations of the [Alter summit](#) movements, political groups, associations and individuals