

The left in France must abandon its silence on the war in Ukraine

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The majority of the left in France - we'll leave aside the sectors that openly support Putin - condemns this war of aggression by Russian imperialism, demands the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. But at the same time, it remains paralysed and voiceless, abandoning the field of defence of Ukraine to Macron, to the bourgeoisie.

A deafening, shocking silence

Presidential and parliamentary elections are traditionally the moment when strategic priorities are debated and compared, including those concerning the international situation. But, for most of the left in France, it is clear that Putin's Russian war against Ukraine was not part of its strategic priorities during these elections. Probably, to avoid the very important divergences on this issue between the different components of the left-wing coalition Nupes from coming to light during the election campaign and weakening the very promising new alliance. In particular, in relation to the very controversial positions of part of the left on Ukraine and Russia since the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Donbass in 2014. So much so that during the elections the subject practically disappeared within the left

Also - let's note in passing - at the other end of the political spectrum, within the neo-fascist far right of National Rally. It is Putin's main political ally in France and Western Europe, laudatory and beholden to his dictatorial regime. Seeing that support for the invasion of Ukraine could cost her dearly in terms of lost voters, Le Pen preferred to make a tactical retreat and perform electoral acrobatics with a 180° turn to make her voters believe that she condemned the invasion of Ukraine. And so she preferred not to say anything more on the subject during the elections.

In chapter 8 of the 650-point joint program of the left-wing Nupes coalition, entitled "European Union and International", the proposal is to: "Defend the sovereignty and freedom of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people as well as the integrity of its borders, in an international context of tensions and war on the European continent and in the face of war crimes decided by Vladimir Putin." That sentence is right. But the problem is that ... during the actual elections even this sentence remained a dead letter. Radio silence. And this silence continues to this day.

To try to justify this silence, some on the left even went so far as to offer a very strange explanation: international affairs would be the domain of the President of the Republic, of Macron, to whom they left the task of dealing with the Ukrainian dossier. For a left that never ceases to denounce monarchical presidentialism and the lack of power of the National Assembly, this is an astounding abandonment of this burning international issue to Macron.

Let's make it clear: this silence of the Nupes—of its four allies, its candidates and its elected deputies—constitutes its main weakness, its Achilles heel. Simply because this silence concerns the central issue today, the most urgent, the most frightening one, namely that of the biggest and most

destructive war in Europe since the Second World War. A war waged for more than four months against Ukraine, the second largest country in Europe, by Putin's Russia, the largest country in Europe! As someone said in a recent debate on the war in Ukraine, Europe and the world are facing three emergencies: the climate emergency, the social emergency and the Ukrainian emergency. I would add a fourth, the health emergency. But on the Ukrainian emergency, the silence of the left in France is downright deafening, shocking!

The importance of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine

In France, only a minority of trade unions, trade union sectors, political organisations and social movement associations, as well as organisations of the Ukrainian and Chechen diaspora, are doing what they can. Since February 24 they have been conducting solidarity campaigns, organising trade union convoys with humanitarian aid, information missions to Ukraine, rallies and debates. In the framework of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (RESU/ENSU) and its French branch, among other forums. Ensemble! - as you will remember - was one of the initiators following the first debate on Ukraine held at this same national Collective on February 26, just two days after the beginning of the invasion. Several comrades from [Ensemble! Insoumis](#) [Ensemble! Members who joined Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Insoumise] also participate in this European network. This is a common ground of work between our two currents and others, which - I hope - can be strengthened in the coming weeks and months in support of the armed and unarmed Ukrainian resistance to Russian imperialism.

Now that the elections are over, this silence and this tactical circumspection can no longer last.

[...] The French branch of the RESU/ENSU network has decided to address the parliament of Nupes [...] to ask the Nupes deputies to organise a hearing on the war in Ukraine in the National Assembly as soon as possible, inviting activists from the Ukrainian left-wing organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement), as well as representatives of Ukrainian trade unions, feminist associations, etc. Since the beginning of the war, several of these activists have regularly published analyses and appeals to the Western left in international left-wing journals, which our European Network has translated and disseminated. Unfortunately, the Western left is very slow to take note of them, to analyse them, to discuss them and to be inspired by them.

The idea is also to organise a tour of information and debate with these Ukrainian activists in the main centres and forces of the social movement in France, starting in September.

Some ideas on the left that need to be discussed and clarified

There are some ideas and proposals that come up regularly on the left that need to be discussed and clarified. I will point out just a few of them, briefly.

- “We need peace and a halt to hostilities”. This is obvious. One cannot but agree. But the problem is that a peace must be just. And the first condition for a just peace in Ukraine is the withdrawal of Russian troops from all the territory of that country. Otherwise, it will be an imperialist peace, a peace of annexation of territories (Crimea, Donbass, other regions perhaps).

Some on the left add that we should “return to the Minsk agreements” of 2014 and 2015. However, these agreements did not work, precisely because the electoral processes they provided for in the Donbass were to be held before (sic!) the withdrawal of Russian troops and Russian paramilitary mercenary units, in other words under Russian occupation. And it was France and Germany, Hollande and Merkel, who at the time pressured Ukraine to accept these conditions.

The same pressure from the Western powers on Ukraine is going on behind the scenes today. It is increasingly being discussed in political forums and the media. The Russian armies are moving slowly, despite stiff Ukrainian resistance, and the weapons promised by the governments are arriving too slowly and too little—only 10% of what was promised has been delivered, according to statements by the Ukrainian authorities in June!

It is true that these deliveries are accelerating and cover increasingly modern equipment. But there is every reason to fear that negotiations in the style of the Munich Agreement of 1938 are taking place behind the scenes. And the summer holiday period, which is just beginning, will most likely be used by Putin to further advance his agenda.

The left must not condone these pressures. The left must clearly and openly support Ukraine's right to self-determination, and therefore first and foremost the right to defend itself militarily against the aggressor - and this by all means at its disposal. The left must state loud and clear that Ukraine and its people are fighting a war of national liberation, and should mobilise massively in their defence, following the example of what was done against the US imperialist war in Vietnam in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century.

- Another proposal that comes up regularly on the left is “an international conference on borders”. An international conference or conferences would of course be useful, but always and again on the primary condition that their basis, their prerequisite, is the withdrawal of Putin's troops from Ukraine. Otherwise, it will necessarily be a conference, where the great powers will negotiate with Putin the borders of a Ukraine cut down by a fifth or a quarter of its territory - probably with a pencil and ruler, as in the 19th and 20th centuries when colonies and zones of influence were divided up.

The promoters of this proposal also add that “following the collapse of the USSR, there were no negotiations on borders”, a fact they say is unprecedented in modern history. And that this was therefore a very bad thing. But what does not seem to interest the supporters of this strange thesis is that whole peoples were freed from Russian oppression in the two-three years following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, through a whole chain of democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR, including Ukraine.

The Western powers did not have to negotiate any borders. It was these peoples who - within their historical borders - freed themselves from the colonial tutelage of the Kremlin. Western imperialisms did not want these revolutions, just as they did not want German reunification. They tried to negotiate “reforms” with these various bureaucratic dictatorships, like Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand with Mikhail Gorbachev between 1987 and 1990. But they had to back down and accept, not without ulterior motives of course, the results of these popular, democratic revolutions, and with them all the new frontiers. In short, they had to resign themselves to accepting the practical exercise by all these peoples of their right to decide their fate, their right to independence, to national self-determination.

- Where the whole of the left could perhaps agree is to propose and implement a new system of collective security, which would be based on the UN. But - let's add it right away - a UN that urgently needs to be reformed from top to bottom.

Here are some ideas, to be discussed and developed with other currents on the left, which should be started as soon as possible.

The United Nations must be genuinely re-founded so that it can fulfil its role as the guarantor of peace and security in the world, and as the international framework for peaceful cooperation

between all peoples. This refoundation should be based on the basic ideas and founding principles contained in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted at the end of the Second World War. These principles should be dusted off, updated and adapted to today's conditions. These principles are regularly violated and even forgotten because of the unbearable domination of a UN of 193 member countries by five states, the so-called "great powers" and permanent members of the Security Council, each with the right of veto.

The first and imperative condition for such a refoundation is to finally abandon this paralysing system of veto rights, which is what more and more voices around the world have been demanding for years.

The Security Council should be accountable to the General Assembly of all UN member states, 193 today. The Security Council must cease to depend on bargaining between the five imperialist "great powers" that share the world and their so-called "spheres of influence".

The principle of equality between peoples must be restored by applying the simple mechanism of one country - one vote.

A radical and urgent reform of the Blue Helmets is needed, so that they become once again what they were created for. Namely, as their name says, a "United Nations peacekeeping force", intended to protect civilian populations in war zones and also to serve as an interposition force between belligerents.

No so-called legitimate military intervention should take place without the approval and vote of the UN.

Exceptional financial resources must be made available so that the UN can fulfil its role. Just like its specialised organisations, such as the FAO - faced with Putin's ignoble blackmail of world hunger, with the blocking of Ukrainian cereals, or the WHO - for the fight against the Covid pandemic, and others.

For the convening of an extraordinary European Social Forum (ESF)

I come back to this proposal, already outlined at the National Council of February 26, just at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and at the various debate meetings.

- I think we should put back on the agenda and pick up the thread of the European Social Forum (ESF) process, so promising and enthusiastic during the first editions in 2002 in Florence and 2003 in Paris-St. Denis, then alas progressively disintegrated and abandoned.
- The left should (re)develop the ideas of a European Social Forum for another Europe - democratic, ecological, social, based on the right to self-determination of the peoples. Now adding the goal of a free and independent Ukraine, free from the Putin invaders. A Europe also with a Russia and its people finally succeeding in getting rid of Putin's dictatorship. Just as the Russian people had succeeded in the past in getting rid of Stalin, the Stalinists, the bureaucracy falsely called "communist".
- Above all, with the preparation of this new European Social Forum, a central place should be given this time to the trade unions, democratic, feminist and left-wing movements of Ukraine, Russia, all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and, let us add, the Scandinavian countries. All these countries are directly threatened by the warlike actions of Putin's Russian imperialism.

The left in France and Western Europe must finally come to terms with this reality and understand it. The first condition is to finally free ourselves from this kind of "Western-centric" geopolitical

deformation—according to which the left in Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Rome or Madrid necessarily knows best what is good for Europe—and to listen to the left and the trade unions of Ukraine and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They have a lot to teach us.

- To start with, the RESU/ENSU European Network and all its constituent organisations could call for the preparation of a European Assembly in autumn 2022 to prepare an extraordinary European Social Forum as soon as possible. There is an urgent need for a project for another Europe, in parallel with the campaign against the war in Ukraine.

Demands that the left should put forward

a) Sufficient quantity and quality of weapons

Until June, the Ukrainian authorities reported that only 10% of the modern weapons promised by Western countries had actually been delivered to Ukraine. According to the left-wing organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh, most of the weapons supplied in the first months were old and obsolete, especially from the US, and therefore not very effective against the powerful Russian army, the second largest in the world. Since then, the situation has improved, but the deliveries are still insufficient to enable Ukraine to force the Russian imperialist armies to leave the invaded and temporarily occupied territories.

In a recent interview published on June 7 on the website of Workers' Liberty, one of the organisations of the British radical left, Vladislav Starodubtsev, one of the leaders of Sotsialnyi Rukh, put forward an important proposal to link the struggles in the East and West: "You want to demilitarise in the West. Very well, then first send your weapons to Ukraine, and don't replace them with new ones. And I would add that the countries of the West - especially France! - should stop sending all these hyper-sophisticated weapons to bloodthirsty, dictatorial regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, and redirect them to Ukraine, with the funding and training that go with it."

b) Support for Ukraine's application to join the EU

The left should support Ukraine's application, while opposing the neoliberal economic conditions demanded by Western finance for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The left must make it clear that Ukraine's accession to the EU is a basic democratic right, especially from a country occupied and devastated by Putin's soldiers. And at the same time to campaign against the implementation of austerity programmes demanded by the big industrial groups and banks, which are looking for cheap labour and huge profits in the East. It would also be a very effective way of linking the Ukrainian people's struggle for independence with our struggles in the West against neoliberal Europe. The struggle for another Europe must be waged jointly in the West and in the East.

c) Cancellation of the Ukrainian debt

The French left and other Western countries should take up this issue. The Ukrainian left has been urging us to do so since the beginning of this war. It is urgent to loosen the deadly stranglehold of the foreign debt, the payment of which is being demanded by the Western banks, the IMF and the EU member states without a second thought. Several left-wing organisations from Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden and Denmark are campaigning for the cancellation of the Ukrainian debt and say: "In the name of all Ukrainians, we demand debt cancellation".

The aim is simple: to redirect the enormous financial resources swallowed up by this debt and the servicing of the debt (the interest) to the defence of Ukraine and the needs of the population. Here

again we have an example of the clear link with our struggles in the West against illegitimate debts that burden the people of our countries.

d) For strong and effective economic sanctions

A little more space should be devoted to the issue of sanctions. Economic sanctions against Russian imperialism are absolutely essential. It is a question of paralysing the militaristic machine and the warlike madness unleashed by Putin against Ukraine. And which also threatens the whole of Europe and the world, since this despot, who has become totally irresponsible, is now brandishing the cowardly blackmail of world famine and nuclear cataclysm.

The Kremlin's armies must be forced to evacuate the entire territory of Ukraine, which they have occupied since 2014 and February 2022. We must also prevent Putin's war adventurism from leading to an even greater military, ecological, economic and social catastrophe, both European and global, as the sinister examples of the occupation and the firing of missiles over Europe's largest nuclear power plant, in the town of Zaporijia on the Dnieper, show us.

The right to self-determination and independence of Ukraine must be defended against the will of Russian imperialism to annihilate the Ukrainian nation as such, a will clearly expressed by Putin in his speeches justifying the invasion of the country. This is exactly the same right to self-determination of the invaded and oppressed peoples, which the left always defends as one of its main values and objectives of struggle on all continents.

With all the differences in times and regimes, the left today must defend this right of Ukraine as it did in the past during the Vietnam War against US imperialism (1965-1975); or during the colonial wars waged by French imperialism against the Indochinese (1946-1954) and Algerian (1954-1962) peoples; or during the global campaign against the invasion of Iraq by US imperialism and its allies (2003).

But the sanctions, as applied in recent months by the various Western imperialist governments, are only partially effective, inconsistent and therefore wholly inadequate.

The embargo on the enormous fortunes of the Russian oligarchs - amassed in thirty years of privatisation and plundering of the state economy of the former Soviet Union - has only been marginally implemented. It has so far only affected a tiny fraction of them, estimated at about a thousand, including the top 70 billionaires. Obviously, the big capitalists of the Western countries and the imperialist governments that protect them—like the French CAC 40 fortunes—are dragging their feet and exploiting all legal subterfuges to avoid or delay the confiscation of the assets of their Russian compatriots. The reason is simple: both hide their fortunes in the same tax havens around the world and in Europe. They protect each other.

The most important of these oligarchs, Putin, who moreover controls all the other oligarchs through his state, police and military power, has not even been worried. His fortune, estimated to range from a few billion to tens of billions of dollars, seems to be well hidden in a labyrinth of shell companies, nominees and tax havens. All these fortunes represent at least hundreds if not thousands of billions of dollars. Embargoed and confiscated, they should be used to compensate Ukraine for the terrible destruction and massacres that country has already suffered because of Putin's imperial madness.

The same problem, even worse, concerns the embargo decided on Russian oil and gas, but whose implementation is very partial (for oil) if not constantly postponed (for gas). So much so that the 27 EU member states, after much hesitation and procrastination, decided not to take any decision on Russian gas at the last European Council meeting.

Yet, by continuing to buy gas and oil from the Kremlin, the Western imperialist governments are paradoxically helping to finance Putin's war against Ukraine. More than a hundred billion dollars have been paid to him since the beginning of the invasion. The Russian economy is a giant with feet of clay, dependent as it is on the export of fossil fuels and raw materials in order to be able to import high-tech products and equipment. A total and consequent embargo on Russian gas and oil would be an effective and quick way to force Putin to withdraw his troops from Ukraine. But obviously, in this case too, the big Western capitalists and the governments that protect them do not want this, as they make very juicy profits from fossil fuel deals with Moscow.

Yet such an embargo on Russian fossil fuels would in turn be a historic opportunity to move from words to deeds and accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels for good. This is a central issue in the fight against climate change today. Putin's war in the heart of Europe and the subsequent remilitarisation in the West are bringing Europe and the world dangerously close to the proverbial brink.

There are reports and proposals, notably from scientists and Greens in various countries. All progressive forces—ecological, social, trade union, democratic, associative, political—should join forces to initiate the exit from fossil energies, the shift towards renewable energies, to save the climate, the planet and peace. It is in this framework that we must discuss - and decide! - sanctions on Russian gas and oil.

Developing left solidarity with Ukraine

Since its formation immediately after the start of the Russian invasion, the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine has more than 600 signatories—organisations, personalities, activists—from more than 20 countries, including Ukraine and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Calls to join it have also come from left-wing personalities in Latin America, the countries of the South and the United States.

We need to make the activities of this Network more widely known. In particular, the results of trips to Ukraine, meetings with trade unions and the Ukrainian left, and humanitarian convoys organised by the trade unions. The various working groups are also carrying out very sustained activities: work with Ukrainian trade unions, defence of the rights of Ukrainian women and refugees, the situation in the provisionally occupied territories, analyses and debates, etc. All this work is carried out, of course, in English and French. All this work is of course carried out in common with the Razem left party of Poland (see their recent congress), Romania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and of course Ukraine! We have a lot to learn from them!

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P.S.

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