

Ukraine makes Lindsey German distort Vietnam war

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The 24 May Stop the War Coalition fringe meeting at the conference of civil service union PCS was poorly attended, despite being officially promoted by the union. (There's an issue that PCS, while taking a [strong internationalist position on Ukraine](#), and affiliating to and working with the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#), continues to formally support Stop the War.)

The Stop the War speakers, Andrew Murray and Lindsey German, made no reference to the [pro-Ukraine motion](#) going from the PCS national executive to the conference that afternoon – evidently preferring to avoid the subject rather than having a fight they would lose. At the conference itself too, in a way astonishingly, no one got up to oppose the motion and only three hands out of hundreds went up against. Though delegates undoubtedly supported a pro-Ukraine stance overwhelmingly, this surely did involve some opportunism on the part of the Stop the War people.

I attended the fringe meeting along with PCS activist Tom Harris, who visited Ukraine on a [solidarity delegation last year](#), and we both challenged Stop the War. There is one point about the debate at the meeting we thought we should report.

I asked why Ukraine getting arms and military aid from Western powers was different from Vietnam getting such support from the Soviet Union and China during its war against the US. I also mentioned Bangladesh in 1971, Irish rebels against Britain, and the Spanish Civil War. Lindsey German's response was noteworthy.

Firstly, she declared that comparing Zelensky's Ukraine to Vietnam and the Spanish Republic was "an insult".

We oppose Zelensky's right-wing government. But the Stalinists who dominated the Vietnamese resistance to US imperialism created a totalitarian state in which no labour movement existed and no organised opposition was tolerated. The Spanish Republican government violently defended Spanish capitalism – and even Spain's colonial empire – against a workers' uprising, opening the door to Franco by suppressing that movement.

The arguments to support Vietnam against the US and the Spanish Republic against the fascists were not that the forces leading these struggles were good. It is that expelling the US from Vietnam, and preventing the victory of Spanish fascism, were very far from a matter of indifference from a working-class, socialist point of view.

Secondly, German said that there was "no comparison" in terms of arms, because the Soviet Union only sent Vietnam "a few guns" (or words to that effect). So if it had sent more weapons, I asked, should the left have opposed that? (German's only response to my mild heckle: "Be quiet!")

Afterwards though, I went back and checked the facts. German grossly misrepresented the history.

The exact figures are discussed, but the basic picture is clear. The Soviet Union sent vast amounts of military aid to the Vietnamese resistance, including thousands of tanks and armoured vehicles, many thousands of pieces of heavy artillery, and significant numbers of helicopters and fighter jets. Meanwhile thousands of Soviet soldiers (including, as it happens, large numbers of Ukrainians) took part in the conflict – in stark contrast to Ukraine now, where the number of Western soldiers or similar even present in the country, let alone playing any military role, is negligible.

China also sent very large amounts of military aid to the Vietnamese, including tens of thousands of troops. The Chinese military claims to have caused 38% of American air losses during the war. (In 1979, China invaded Vietnam. Did Chinese military aid to Vietnam during the war with the US make it more able to defend itself against China's invasion or not?)

Despite large-scale foreign military involvement on the Vietnamese side, the Vietnam war remained, at bottom, not a proxy war between imperialisms but a national liberation struggle by the Vietnamese people – without whose heroism the US could not have been defeated. Without major military support from outside they might not have succeeded, however.

There are of course other such cases – for instance the Bangladeshi war of liberation against Pakistan's genocidal repression in 1971, heavily supported and organised by the Indian government to strike a blow at its regional rival. Should socialists have called for India to stop arming the Bangladeshi fighters?

The fact that Lindsey German – who as she explained huffily in the fringe meeting was involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement as a young activist – now has to distort what happened in Vietnam in order to justify her comrades' failings on Ukraine says a lot.

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