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Armenian leftists: We consciously choose peace

Monday 26 October 2020, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 23 October 2020).

When reading texts like this, it is necessary to, first and foremost, acknowledge that their real impact is insignificant, even compared to the most toothless statements of the OSCE Minsk group and other international organisations. And therefore, the aim of such texts is not exactly some measurable impact, but rather the proclamation of the principles for the present and the future as a clarification of the position of groups and individuals that were powerless in the past and at the same time cannot not participate in the struggle.

This struggle is waged against inequality, oppression, armed conflicts that erupt regularly due to the logic of nation states and imperialist aspirations, and against authoritarian systems that violate, oppress and exclude human dignity.

Our struggle is not merely anti-war. It is a part of the broader anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-fascist struggle waging worldwide. Unfortunately, this struggle has fallen upon us along with a full-scale war and a deadly pandemic.

Writing texts like this also implies an opportunity of abstracting oneself from the news stream of current events and seeing the reality more broadly. The thousands of dead soldiers and civilians, the wounded and the lives maimed, however, makes it impossible to fully separate ourselves from that reality.

This war started on September 27 by the order of the Azerbaijani political elites and with the full support of the Turkish authorities. However, this war is the predictable continuation of the war that was frozen in 1994, but that never brought peace, as well as decades of negotiations, as secretive as they were fruitless. The process went on for so long without any resolution because of the Armenian and Azerbaijani elites' class/economic interests, their prioritization of chauvinism and political expediency over human lives, the isolation of the two societies from one another, and the uprooting of any vision of peaceful coexistence.

We need to admit that neither the socialists, nor the liberals were able to counter this xenophobic language that made it impossible to have substantial negotiations. [Former Armenian President Robert] Kocharyan's nonsense about the genetic incompatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis was presented and, by many, perceived as an undeniable fact by many Armenians.

The two former empires pursuing aggressive policies in the region had also laid the ground for this war. Both dictators who have seized the power from the peoples of Russia and Turkey speak the same language, keeping the maps of their collapsed empires as a guide.

Were Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power as a result of the 2018 mass popular movement, "Velvet Revolution", and his Civil Contract Party not affected by the propaganda machine that had been working for decades? Of course they were. A vivid example of that is Pashinyan's statement from

Stepanakert in August 2019: “Artsakh [the Armenian name for Nagorno Karabakh] is Armenia. Period.” We are convinced that through substantial and transparent negotiations, mutual concessions and a negotiating process led by the imperative of seeking justice and lasting peace, it would have been possible to avoid the tragedy. However, history does not know the word “if” and does not go back to the starting point, allowing us to replay our choices of war and peace.

War changes people in catastrophic ways. It changes their perception and the conversation about peace.

In the context of war, a new discourse is created, which spreads both in Armenia and Azerbaijan: “We will not leave the war to the next generation”. This is said by both Armenian and Azerbaijani volunteers and conscripts.

The mythologized history textbooks, the personal and collective grief and trauma, the provocation we see in the media—of course, always done by the other side,—as well as the horizon of events that exist in the logic of the nation states are pushing to choose the path of war, destruction and self-destruction.

We consciously choose peace.

The responsibility for the casualties and the destruction of the war lies with the one who chooses war. At the same time, all anti-war forces, individually or collectively, must demand the investigation of the war crimes of all sides and the punishment of those responsible. The first step in rejecting war is to confront, admit and take responsibility for its atrocities.

Owing to the influence of the propaganda media, war atrocities have only grown in their barbarity. The humiliation of dead and wounded soldiers, the execution of prisoners of war and corpse looting, are no longer just the companion of war in the battlefield, but a product of the mass media. Those producing propaganda for mass consumption turn to “the people”, “God”, “friends”, “relatives” and “ancestors” from whom they have supposedly inherited the glorious mission of waging the sacred war. When compared to the state-subsidized military melodramas and eroticised images of teenage soldiers, the pornographic, destructive images of war crimes committed by the enemy are quite real.

Like a forbidden drug, these narratives and images spread from one person to another. For those away from the front, seeking information about their relatives, this drug, whether packaged by the state or their neighbour, becomes a means of delaying apathy through attacks of panic and euphoria. This is how violence and mass murders get normalized, and they will stay with us after the war along with undetonated mines.

We were not ready to believe that this unique type of necrophilia would become a part of the news feed in both countries so fast. This is the new language of genocide that needs to be confronted.

One of the first steps of building peace after the war must be the clear recognition of the rights of the two peoples. This was the main failure of the new Armenian authorities over the last two years. Next to the rights of self-determination and security of Nagorno Karabakh Armenians, we need to place the rights of the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno Karabakh and the adjacent territories who were expelled during the war. It is more important that these rights are accepted in Armenia and among diaspora Armenians.

This is the path that will allow us to speak about the restoration of the rights of Armenian and Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia, Azerbaijan and the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region [NKAO].

Even during the difficult days of war we need to remember that the territories marked on the map are a home for people: for many Armenians and especially Azerbaijanis, a lost home.

The conversation about the restoration of the rights of refugees does not imply groups of primary and secondary importance. Irrespective of their ethnic identity, country of residence and attitude towards one another, these people are victims of nationalism and war, hostages of an unresolved conflict.

Now, during an ongoing war, it is difficult to talk about the possibility of achieving the full restoration of the rights of refugees and personal security at the same time. However, the advocates of peace and justice have to admit: the disregard towards violated rights continues the injustice and feeds the mutual hatred.

After their occupation, the Armenian-occupied Azerbaijani territories adjacent to the former NKAO were used as a mere form of exchange, as leverage in a(n unsuccessful) bid to achieve NKAO's recognition as Armenian. Territories in exchange for status. Only later, slowly, the political elites and the nationalist intelligentsia changed their view of these territories, to first, a security guarantee (today's catastrophic reality has exposed this illusion), and then as a sacred land for which blood was shed.

Today people are dying for the perpetuation of the war.

This transformation of the discourse is also a function of the capitalist appropriation of these territories. As long as the land is property of capitalists, the elites that they feed will perpetuate the myth of national ownership. But in fact, the Azerbaijani and Armenian national cause of Karabakh merely aims for the consecration of property rights.

We have to acknowledge that we have lacked the courage to formulate the problem in these terms. Remaining in the besieged fortress of the nation state, we have allowed the discrediting of class comradery, solidarity and friendship. But the higher the walls of the Armenian and Azerbaijani fortresses have gone, the greater the pressure the lords have put on us. This decades-long conflict has taken everything away from us: it has legitimized exploitation, injustice and inequality, violated our dignity, imagination and dreams. Are we really going to surrender to the dictates of the capitalist system, retreat, and concede our right to our existence? Are we really going to tolerate being left on both sides of the border once again, with the poison of enmity and sorrow as sole compensation for our suffering?

The restoration of people's rights through peace and the revolutionization of societies should become the mission of all progressive, specifically anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, feminist and environmental groups in both societies. These are the groups who have to take on the task of securing peace and harmonious development.

Indeed, it is the people of the region—rather than foreign imperialist forces, who all too often use them as puppets—who should be resolving that task.

We fully realize the imperative of history to transcend the borders of the nation-state in order to build environments that are just, free and egalitarian, based on solidarity, and to ensure harmonious development of their societies. Any individual struggle stemming from this imperative is part of a global struggle, but the necessity of local and short-term actions requires a clear agenda. We suggest the following as a guide, for us and for our comrades from Azerbaijan and other countries:

- Ceasefire now!
- Development of discourse that excludes war: governments unable to maintain peace are to be

declared non-democratic and misanthropic, and should thus lose their legitimacy

- Support for people whose rights have been violated during the general mobilization
- Full account for and condemnation of war crimes perpetrated by both sides during the war
- Development of a discourse that prioritizes the complete restoration of people's rights above border claims
- Building solidarity, commonality of interests and challenges through individual, organizational and community levels by utilizing all methods of people-to-people diplomacy
- De-militarization of the whole region and firstly of Azerbaijan and Armenia, i.e. offensive weapons should be proportionally and consistently sent to landfills, both physically and metaphorically

Long live the peace and revolution that are to come tomorrow!

AA

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LS

Anybody who wishes to join them can sign here:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdcB6aIqq58MhO7brx2BeB9NwCb6PmMmM3FaUzI5qtHR1ut3w/viewform>

Collective

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P.S.

Note from the editors: Three weeks ago LeftEast published an [anti-war statement of the Azerbaijani left](#). Now we are proud to publish the response of the anti-war Armenian leftists. In the meantime, the war has continued despite two ceasefires. The numbers of killed are hard to estimate, but are in the thousands by now, military as well as civilian.

Left East

<https://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/armenian-leftists-choose-peace/>