

Once More: Should socialists support or oppose NATO arms to Ukraine?

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Today the majority of socialists in the West argue that it is our duty to oppose “our” government’s sending arms to Ukraine. They equate the situation today with that at the start of WW I. At that time, almost all socialists supported their “own” capitalists in sending their workers to that imperialist slaughter in the interests of their “own” imperialists. By doing so, those socialists not only betrayed socialism, they betrayed the working class.

“Learn to Think”

At that time, those socialists who opposed supporting that war called on workers to “fight the enemy at home”. They were right. Today, most socialists mechanically repeat that phrase in opposing the NATO nations sending arms to Ukraine. These socialists today think that means that whatever our “own” capitalists say or do, we must everywhere and always say the opposite. That is letting the capitalists control us, but in reverse. It’s not that Trotsky was always right, but he wrote a very good little essay called [Learn to Think](#). In it he dealt with exactly this issue. He pointed out that 9 times out of ten we will oppose what “our” capitalists say or do, but there can always be that tenth time. We have to judge the situation based on the actual conditions. Among other things Trotsky posed the question of a hypothetical uprising of Algerians against French colonial rule. He asked what should be the position of socialists if the fascist Mussolini wanted to send arms to the Algerians. Mussolini would be doing so for his own imperialist reasons, but Trotsky explained that even so, socialists should not only support that, they should actively help sending those arms to Algeria. Doing so had nothing at all to do with supporting Mussolini. It is similar with the NATO nations sending arms to Ukraine.

In any case, today the situation is much more similar to the onset of WW II, when the Nazis invaded one country after another.

The Coup in Myanmar/Burma

The fact that the Western capitalists are supporting Zelensky against Russia is used to claim that this is just an interimperialist war. That is nonsense. Would they make the same claim about the situation in Myanmar/Burma? There, the military seized direct power through a bloody coup. Hundreds of thousands of workers and young people rose up to resist that coup. They were mowed down in the streets by the Myanmar military. Now there is something of a civil war going on there. The US and other Western capitalist countries support the opposition (although minimally so). The Chinese and Russian imperialists support the coup. So would the Western socialists claim that what is happening there is simply an inter-imperialist war?

Some counterpose the arming of the Ukrainian army with a call for unity between the Russian and the Ukrainian working class and for the revolutionary overthrow of both capitalist governments.

Again, we should think about the situation in Myanmar:

Similarly to in Ukraine, the resistance to the generals in Myanmar is being led by the capitalist former government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi. She was the head of state who at best stood by while the Rohingya were being slaughtered by the military. In fact, she somewhat justified it. So, should socialists simply say “we must not support either side in Myanmar, and instead call for unity of the Russian, Chinese and Myanmar working class and the overthrow of capitalism in all three countries together?”

This argument is a form of “ultamitism”. It is saying in effect: “Until you workers in both countries are ready to act together and overthrow capitalism, there is nothing to be done, and we will not support any resistance to Russia’s invasion (or to the coup in Myanmar) Until then, this is nothing but an inter-imperialist war and we won’t support either side.” The fact that Myanmar does not face an invasion from outside makes the argument even stronger.

Theory a Guide to Action

If theory is not a guide to action it is just sophistry. Many of those socialists say they are opposed to the invasion, but what does that mean in practice, given their opposition to the NATO nations arming Ukraine? Do they think that mere words, mere propaganda, mere pressure will stop Putin? He has proven in the only arena that really counts – the arena of action – that it will not. What partially stopped Putin – at least for now in his drive for total regime change – was a military defeat.

That is what will stop the invasion, and for that arms are necessary. There is only one source of those arms: the NATO nations.

No-Fly Zone & Blue Helmets

The call for a no-fly zone is a different question. That would be an invitation for Western imperialism to directly send in its own troops. In the future, those troops would be used to reinforce the the Western imperialist interests against any movement of the Ukrainian working class.

It is similar with the issue of calling for the UN “blue helmets” to be sent in as a peacekeeping force. Given the presence of both China and Russia on the UN Security Council, there is only one instance in which such troops could be sent in: If Russia is defeated and is being driven out of Luhansk and Donetsk, and if the other imperialists on the UN Security Council felt threatened by a possible workers uprising in the region, and if they simply wanted capitalist stability in Ukraine, then both sides might agree to send in UN troops in order to maintain the status quo prior to Russia’s invasion.

Russian Working Class

As far as the Russian working class: It’s impossible to know what the mood is right now. But until the invasion, Putin’s support was pretty widespread. The best, in fact the only way to seriously cut into that support and turn workers against Putin is through the military defeat of the Russian army. That, for example, was why the great bulk of the US working class turned against the Vietnam War – because they saw their sons, brothers and friends coming home maimed or dead. Nobody likes to see this sort of human suffering, but if Putin’s invasion succeeds it will increase the patriotism and chauvinism in Russia and will increase the support for Putin. So if socialists want to see the Russian working class take its leave of Putin and rise up against him, then they must support the military defeat of the Russian army.

Once again, we return to the question of arms for Ukraine, because such a defeat is just as impossible without receiving arms from the West as it was for the American Indians to defeat the US

cavalry with bows and arrows vs. the Gatling gun.

Conclusion

The defeat of Putin's invasion will be a gain for the working class in Ukraine, in Russia and around the world. That defeat can only happen militarily. For that, Ukraine needs arms and the only source of those arms is the NATO nations. War is a horrible thing, but like gravity it is here. How long and at what cost Putin's invasion can be fought is up to the Ukrainian people, not us here in the West.

From every angle, opposition to the West sending arms to Ukraine means in practice calling for the victory of Putin's invasion. There is no way around it.

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