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# **Social Movement (Ukraine): What's going on in Ukraine and why left solidarity is important**

Friday 20 May 2022, by [KYSELOV Oleksandr](#), [LOMONOSOVA Nataliia](#) (Date first published: 20 May 2022).

**[Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal](#) — Nataliia Lomonosova and Oleksandr Kyselov, the delegation from Ukraine's Social Movement (Sotsialnyi Rukh) to the annual conference of the Danish Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten), gave these greetings to its delegates on May 15.**

**The Red-Green Alliance is known in Danish as Enhedslisten—De Rød-Grønne (Unity Ticket—the Red-Greens) because it began in 1989 as an electoral alliance of the Left Socialists, Communist Party of Denmark and Socialist Workers Party.**

As we are talking the war continues: even at the most remote regions of Ukraine missiles are shot, people are killed, infrastructure and housing is destroyed, depriving those alive of access to very basic needs. The war has made millions of Ukrainians internally displaced in their own country or refugees abroad.

One can see dozens keep living in the Kyiv subway cause their houses were demolished by the Russian bombs. One can see care facilities in western Ukraine overcrowded with vulnerable people, elderly, people with disabilities who experience exhausting and dangerous evacuation, a long and scary road after their care institutions or boarding schools were bombed on purpose.

Instead of hypothetical consideration of which imperialism is a greater threat, we are facing here consequences of a brutal assault launched by a specific one, the Russian one.

Many leftists across the world keep talking about peace. But peace is not an abstract concept: every action, every decision, every word has real-life implications. Without power, without support, without weapons it means surrendering to Russian demands and agreeing to a de facto foreign protectorate and occupation of our territories. And we saw what the Russian world brings with it: indiscriminate killing, looting, arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances, sexual violence and deportations.

No wonder that popular resistance united a broad range of people willing to sacrifice everything to defend their home from the invader: urban professionals, football hooligans and our fellow trade unionists. They cannot stop Russian tanks and missiles with bare words, and they don't have a privilege to reason about the ideal solution. In this case, refusing support to fellow workers is stabbing them in the back.

Yesterday, someone compared the situation with giving a knife to one of the boys fighting in the schoolyard. Well, to begin with, the boy who started the fight, a tough bully, already has knives in both hands. Will you then just watch another boy being slaughtered, or care to intervene?

This being said, we deeply appreciate, and we are extremely grateful for Enhedslisten's readiness to get engaged with the new reality and not shying away from taking responsibility for difficult decisions.

Turning to our government, we would urge you to separate this issue from the people's aspiration to self-determination and the right to self-defence. Please, don't assume, don't generalise and it is true not only with regard to our country. Most Ukrainians have always been very critical of our rulers, even more so *Sotsialny Rukh* as a socialist organisation.

The Ukrainian establishment could be very cynical and manipulative and use patriotic rhetoric to advance the wildest neoliberal agenda. The war continues and many problems get exacerbated, local governments and activists are overwhelmed with evacuation or providing shelters and basic needs to the refugees.

At the same time, the national government has already taken a few steps in the wrong direction. These include limiting trade unions power, decreasing the control over the employers and making attempts to deregulate the labour relations. We can hear that in harsh times the state economy relies on the entrepreneurs who pay taxes and salaries. Somehow, the workers' role is missing in this picture. We see it as our task to remind the government about that. Also, not to forget about thousands of public workers—in the sphere of health care, social sector, education, public transport—who are putting their lives in danger to fulfil their duties, all those who at the same time are doing this on the minimum wage.

We are very well aware of its shortcomings, but this is the only government there is. We as left activists have to deal with it, focusing our efforts on mitigation and building networks that are able to keep this government in check, while trying to survive the war.

### **What *Sotsialnyi Rukh* is, what it did and is doing**

That is what we have been doing over the last few months. We, *Sotsialnyi Rukh*, are a platform that unites progressive left in Ukraine. Created in 2016, *Sotsialnyi Rukh* ultimately aims at establishing a political party to represent working-class people and advocate for alternative ways of social development. Today we have our branches in the major cities of the country - Kyiv, Odessa, Lviv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kryvyi Rih - and sympathisers in the others.

Our main focus has always been on labour rights: supporting independent trade union movements and fighting together against persistent deregulation attempts, and for better working conditions. Whatever was needed the most, we were there: legal aid, media support, organising street actions and solidarity. Over the years we managed to establish strong ties with miners, railway workers, construction workers and crane operators, nurses and trolleybus drivers.

*Sotsialnyi Rukh* has always promoted socialist feminist agenda. We support the nurses and care workers' protest movement and demand recognition of both paid and unpaid reproductive labour. We fight against discrimination at the workplace and against economic inequality. Furthermore, we strive to introduce leftist perspectives into the wider society issues and address the topics of climate change, anti-fascism, LGBT+ rights, and fair rent for the urban dwellers.

We did not stand aside when the war had started either. Amidst the shock and confusion, our activists were enlisting in the territorial defence units, collecting and distributing humanitarian aid, joining and coordinating volunteer networks to support displaced people and activists at risk, those seeking shelter and going to the frontline.

At the organisational level, we became the voice of the left trying to reach out to our sister parties

and movements abroad to build cross-country solidarity networks: by making calls, delivering speeches, petitioning and persuading. Given the widespread prejudice and misperceptions, the discussions were emotionally draining at times, but with the invaluable support of the Polish Razem we were able to create a common platform for European Left Solidarity, calling for unequivocal support of the Ukrainian people's fight against imperialism and for cancellation of unjust foreign debt. We are proud to have Enhedslisten as one of the signatories. Moreover, we were glad to welcome your representatives as our guests in Lviv, along with parliamentarians and trade unionists from different countries, coming to gain first-hand information from the civil actors on the ground. Alongside, we are working to connect different worker initiatives within the country and abroad: to date there were already three humanitarian convoys of the workers' aid sent to Ukraine.

Being probably the only left voice in the country, and attracting much attention, we feel even greater responsibility for being a working-class champion and building a strong grass-root political subject as the war ends. Today Enhedslisten is collecting contributions for *Sotsialnyi Rukh* and we appreciate every cent.

### **The future and concluding remarks**

We share your concerns with the problems in social and health care, infrastructure and education. And we hope that the day will come when the war is over, and we can focus exclusively on the fight for fair salaries for nurses and social workers, for the right to the city and fair rent, just as we did before February 24<sup>th</sup>. But we also believe that to pose a question that you need to choose between the expenditures on the health care and social sector in your country or on military aid to Ukraine could be short-sighted from a long-term perspective. Should Ukraine lose the war and be completely occupied by Russia, the growing militarisation and increase in military spending is inevitable everywhere in Europe. It is not difficult to imagine at what cost this will be done.

"A strong welfare state is not a luxury"—that was said yesterday. Ukrainians also do have a right to have it and to fight for it. And it is impossible to imagine a shift to a democratic socialism under the Russian occupation. United position of the international left whether we speak of support of military aid or of support of cancellation of Ukrainian foreign debt will help us not only to defend ourselves but to build a more solidaristic and egalitarian society after the war.

Hopefully, the war will end, what comes next is the postwar rebuilding of the country. Most probably, the support necessary for this will come from the West. It is of utmost importance to check what conditions will the aid come with. This aid should not come together with the enslaving dependence on loans and the new austerity policies.

We see reconstruction of Ukraine only as a socially oriented project aimed at helping the country's population, rather than enriching both local and foreign business elites. The project would rebuild the social facilities and housing and focus on improving the life of ordinary workers and not on making the country more attractive for the foreign businesses. We call on you to take a strong stance in supporting this kind of postwar reconstruction.

Finally, it goes without saying that today it is not only Ukraine that is under attack, people of Kurdistan and Palestine have been long waging their battles for freedom! It would be a hypocrisy to ignore their suffering, hence we would like to express our full support to their struggles.

Long live international solidarity!

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