

Discussion with Simon Pirani about Donbass, Crimea, Maidan and Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine

Wednesday 13 July 2022, by [MAYER Bradley](#), [PILASH Denis](#), [PIRANI Simon](#), [RACHLIS Charles](#), [ZUUR Cheryl](#) (Date first published: 12 July 2022).

On July 10, the Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign hosted a meeting at which Simon Pirani spoke on the issue of the situation in Donbass and Crimea and Russia's intervention there in 2014 as a prelude to Russia's invasion at the present time. There was a little bit of controversy in the discussion. And this edited version of that meeting focuses on that controversy. And I would say that points of difference and controversy and debate always bring out either the worst or the best in people. In this case, I think it brought out the best. And it certainly made for a more interesting discussion. We have also posted the full length video of that meeting for people that want to watch that. See transcript of this edited version below.

Cheryl Zuur

This is a forum sponsored by the Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign. If you found your way here, you've probably seen our Facebook page. Our Facebook page has our points of unity on it, and a lot of other things. In a few weeks, we're going to be having another event like this one online, that we'll be talking about the influence of fascist ideas in the left, and how it's come to be that the majority of the left especially the socialist left in the world, is on the wrong side of history in regards to Ukraine.

Simon Pirani

I can see in front of me a knowledgeable audience. So I think probably what we can usefully done here is I'll speak about seven points that relate to the theme I was asked to speak about. I'll tell you what they are, and then I'm going to run through them. And then we'll have more time for discussion. They are Ukraine as Russia's oldest colony. Secondly, the character of the Maidan movement in 2014. Thirdly, what was going on in southeast Ukraine before and during 2014. Fourthly, the Russian occupation of Crimea and Donbass. Fifthly, a bit about the international context, sixthly, the short term causes of the new phase of the war. And seven, just some thoughts about what the national question means in the 21st century. So I'm just going to run through those points. The first about Ukraine being Russia's oldest colony, I think, has to be borne in mind in order to understand what's happening now. In the 19th century under the Russian Empire, restrictions on language, subordination to Imperial institutions, the form of land ownership, was a Russian dominated Imperial institution that mattered most to many peasant families was Army conscription. So of course, huge numbers of Ukrainians in the Russian army that fell to pieces during the course of 1917. In 1917, the declaration of the Ukrainian Republic preceded the Bolshevik seizure of power. So during 1917, in the middle of 1917, and I think it was June, a Ukrainian Republic was declared in defiance of the Russian Empire. Or rather, the Russian Empire is

gone, but in defiance of Russian Imperial traditions, which remained strong. This provoked a huge crisis in the Provisional Government in Russia, and this government for much of its existence was led by the left social democrats. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks had no hesitation in organizing to defeat it militarily and to encourage Russian speaking workers, who were brought down to eastern Ukraine in quite large numbers at that time with the start of the iron and steel industry, to encourage those Russian speaking workers to oppose the formation of independent Ukrainian institutions. I cannot recommend too highly the book by Marco Boysson, about the working class and the National question in the revolution in the period from the 1890s, up until 1918. It's a magnificent piece of scholarship by a Marxist of our generation. I mean, unfortunately, I think that one is expensive. And I don't know that any pirate PDFs are knocking about on the internet. But you know, if you're a member of a university library or whatever, it's really essential reading to my mind. Now, the fact that Ukraine was Russia, the Russian Empire's most important colony remains significant through the Soviet period. And indeed, Soviet policy in the 1920s, was actually very strongly in favor of the Ukrainian language. And Ukrainian language was obligatory at levels of government in Ukraine. There were arguments which were never resolved about the extent of independence that the Ukrainian Republic would be allowed within the Soviet Union. But there was an understanding of national rights, which included that language law, which I, I think it'd be really interesting to compare that to the language or of 2018, which is being denounced by every Stalinist and Putinist under the sun. I think, in many respects, the one in 1920s was a little stronger. And I know that, for example, to work in any government position, you had to take a Ukrainian language test, and it was a written test, and people would come and check on you.

So there was a real fight on that. And that policy was reversed in the mid 1930s. And at the end of the USSR, we should recall that following the big miners strikes of 1989, in 1990, there was then again, a resurgence of national and nationalist movements in many of the Soviet republics, and then more so than Ukraine, they had this huge human chain across the whole country. And this was certainly fundamental in leading to the end of the USSR. So disentangling these national and class questions, has never been simple. And I suppose for reasons I'll say the last bit of what I talked about, I for many years thought that the National question, in many ways was receding from importance in the 21st century. And I must say, the events of the last few months have made me rethink that. So going on to the second point, which is the character of the Maidan uprising, in 2014. The Maidan uprising was preceded, of course, by the Orange Revolution of 2004. And broadly speaking, this was a movement in support of democratic rights. Specifically, it concerned the organized rigging of the presidential election. So if we think back to that time, Ukraine had developed a system of financial industrial groups based on property taken out of or partly out of state ownership, and led by oligarchs, politically influential businessmen. That's what I mean by that term. Yanukovych, who was a candidate in that election, represented some of the strongest of these groups based in the east of the country, where the industrial base was, that's the iron, steel, coal, metals, processing chemicals and so on.

Now, there's no direct correlation between one particular section of industry and a group of oligarchs and the political parties, but in general, it's true that it was those Eastern groups that Yanukovich represented, whereas his opponent Viktor Yushchenko, was typical of Western leaning bourgeois liberals in post Soviet countries. The cause of the Orange Revolution was people thought that Yanukovych had tried to fix the vote, which was a common procedure in post Soviet countries. And the outcome was a second election and Yushchenko was declared the winner. There were issues of free speech. There were social issues that played into this as well.

And there was the issue which became much bigger in 2014, of the orientation towards Europe. Many working class Ukrainians supported this orientation. I'm a bit sick of reading in western left wing papers about how this was just a matter of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie. I think that's an

oversimplification. And the reason was that millions and millions of Ukrainians were working in Western Europe. By this time, there was huge migration. I remember when the Orange Revolution broke out in 2004, I happened to be visiting my daughter who was studying in Madrid, and we got on the metro Madrid, and there were all these people dressed in Ukrainian colors, orange colors, going through a demonstration at the Ukrainian embassy, and I just went up and chatted to them. And I mean, what really struck me.

And I'm going to throw these vignettes at you. So I'm not building a whole theory on a conversation in the metro, but I think this was interesting. What was interesting was they were not your typical East European migrants who are young and single. They were families, and they were on a family outing, in their orange colors and, they were going to the embassy, and that just gives you the significance of that is families. That means you've moved there for quite quite a time. It's a different type of migration.

So I think that that shared belief that working in Europe was a better deal for working class Ukrainians than working at home in Ukraine was in the background of these events. Now, of course, there was tension rising between the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and the Russian bourgeoisie. At this period, the Putin regime, intensely disliked the Orange Revolution of 2004. It disliked Ukraine's turn towards Europe. And I've worked for quite a while, 15 years, at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies following the gas sector in Russia and Ukraine. And they have the so called gas wars, which dated from this time when Russia wanted to take majority ownership of the Ukrainian pipeline system, and came pretty close to doing that several times, once, together with Shell, the oil company, and other times different versions, they did that successfully in Belarus, which is significant. They were never able to do it in Ukraine. And it got right to the point of a law being put to the Ukrainian parliament, and at the last minute, the Ukrainian parliament changed its mind. And this became an increasing source of friction. That's a big trade for Russia, as we know this has come out and been discussed a lot this year. I'm sure you're all aware of it. That's a big trade for Russia, and having to transport the gas through Ukraine reduced Russia's room for maneuver, both economically and politically. And then it's a long story, how they tried desperately to get control over that pipeline system. And that was always a bridge that the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and the Ukrainian government would not cross.

So if we go on from 2004: Don't forget that in 2010, there was a further presidential election, when Yanukovich the representative of the Eastern oligarchs was elected without apparently much fooling about with the polls. He was elected and that election was accepted all round as being legitimate. So from 2010 he was the president and of course, he was presiding over an economic disaster for Ukraine that arose from the 2008-09 crisis. Living standards which were very low in the 1990s, lower in most respects than in Russia. And better in the 2000s. The steel industry recovered. Agricultural exports recovered. And then much of this crashed again.

Maidan

And the discussion about the move towards Europe took place under Yanukovich's presidency. And in fact, this was the trigger for the Maidan uprising, I would call it. I mean, it depends how you count. But there were two triggers in a way.

The first was that Yanukovich's people had negotiated an Association Agreement with the EU. The Russians didn't like it. They had tried to stop it. And did stop it at the last minute by effectively making Yanukovich's people a better cash offer in terms of the interstate relationship.

Students went out and demonstrated. Nothing unusual there. The second trigger that turned that into a really mass movement, was the police going out and beating the hell out of these students.

That was what really turned it from simply a protest on this Europe issue to a much broader uprising, which eventually brought Yanukovich down. What I want to say is that there were all sorts of social issues feeding into the uprising in 2014. When that uprising takes on this mass form, it does involve not only a huge proportion of the population, but also, you know, a huge range of political forces from our friends in the socialist, radical socialist and anarchist organizations through to the fascists.

And there's no doubt in my mind that it was the fascists and the ultra nationalists, who were the best organized and the best armed during that uprising, the so called my damn right revolution. They use the occasion to get arms. Don't forget the the authority of the police collapsed across the country. So this was an opportunity for people, and the Fascists were most organized about it, to get their hands on guns in many different locations outside of Kyiv, as well as in Kyiv. itself. Nevertheless, the stuff about it being a so called fascist coup, which we hear from people in the "Stop the War Coalition" here, and you no doubt hear it over that side of the Atlantic is I mean, apart from the political point to it, from their point of view, they're trying to prove a political point about Ukraine, being everlastingly fascist, but from an analytical point of view, it's just stupid. It doesn't mean anything. And even the Kremlin wasn't using that terminology in 2014.

So the third point is about southeast Ukraine, in the period between 2010 and 2014. At that time, Yanukovich, was the president. And the Party of Regions, which was his party was the largest party in parliament, well known for its incredible corruption. I'm using that word in the sense of a model of capitalism, whereby political influence enables you to access extraordinary revenues, which can be creamed off from the economy in certain ways. I think, in that sense, it's a model similar to the model that we saw in Russia at that time. And there's also no doubt that that party had, to some extent, support at least in terms of votes from working class people in eastern Ukraine. So, you know, you would read in the papers or here on the television and Donbass is subsidizing the rest of Ukraine. "We're doing all the work. You guys are dining out on it," and so on and so on.

And there's no doubt in my mind that working class people responded to these arguments.

And I think though those arguments on the one hand, and nervousness about the increasingly strident tone of Ukrainian nationalism, on the other hand, fed into the mood in southeast Ukraine, for support on the one hand, and acceptance on the other hand of the right wing revolt by elements in the Party of Regions, which fed into the separatist movement.

"Subject of Controversy"

These are subjects of huge controversy among friends and comrades and colleagues in Ukraine. I am not an expert, researcher of Ukrainian social issues or political issues. Obviously, I follow this stuff as closely as I can, and I travel was traveling until the pandemic regularly to Ukraine and Russia. But my understanding is that the survey evidence showed in 2014 strong support in southeastern Ukraine for autonomy, different models of autonomy, and little support for separation. Of course, there are separatist elements. And there are the extreme Russian nationalists who are active there at the time. I mean, I would sum up the thing by saying that a conflict, which was a civil conflict, turned into a military conflict in 2014, primarily, because of the military intervention of Russian fascist and extreme nationalists and the Russian army.

Those are the forces that turned it into a military conflict. I think, to pretend that everything would have been fine if they hadn't turned up is an exaggeration. Obviously, there were huge tensions there as a result of years of this political playing on these themes by Yanukovych and his allies. But I think what turns it into a military conflict very clearly, is the intervention of the Russian army, and these irregulars, volunteer forces that fought alongside them. And if we think about the catalogue of

events: the Crimea was annexed very, very soon after the departure of Yanukovich. So, these huge demonstrations in Kyiv, the collapse of the police force across the country, leads to the departure of Yanukovych off, he goes to Russia with his closest people. I've just been reading this book, which has a great journalistic account of the development of the offshore financial system by Oliver Bullough called *Moneyland*, I strongly recommend it. He starts with the example of Yanukovych's own personal wealth, which is pretty impressive. And he sort of follows the money and develops his argument there about the the offshore and the financial system. So Crimea was annexed. There's an there's an immediate crackdown on all types of pro Ukrainian and socialist activists there among the Crimean Tartars and their organizations particularly. And that's followed by the military conflict in Donetsk and Lugansk, which leads to the formation of these republics.

Nature of the Regimes

And I think the character of those regimes is very important. They are lawless client states of Russia. Industry was trashed. Bits of it were taken into ownership by corporations based in or setting up the also lawless, Russia-supported enclave in Georgia. All forms of democracy, including workplace democracy, were trashed. And I mean, there's all history there. We can talk about that some more. Just a quick point about the law: a couple of quick points about politics or of the government controlled part of Ukraine between 2014. First of all, there's a concerted effort by the nationalists to establish this sort of new national identity, there's a decolonization law, similar to other EU East European countries, which I think was passed in 2017. And there's this language law, which was passed in 2018. There are critiques of all this stuff, of course, by Ukrainian socialists. But I think these need to be distinguished from the stereotypes thrown around by the Kremlin, and those who's who repeat Kremlin propaganda. Now, a quick point about the international context, I think, probably this audience is aware of most of this, but in response to the stuff which we hear a lot about, in the so called left in the West, about NATO expansion. So again, I think this needs to be tackled on two levels. First of all, there is an extent to which people are just recycling, whatever the Kremlin is saying. Obviously, there has been NATO expansion. So I think we need to analytically think about the way that that's happened, and whether that can explain in any way, what's going on. My answer to the way that it happened is that you need to look at the economic relationship between Russia and the Western powers. Russia was reduced during the 1990s to be a secondary power, economically a supplier of raw materials. And obviously, all kinds of cooperation, the offshore financial zone being a good example, were established between Western the Western and Russian ruling classes. As the economy emerged in the 1990s - slump, and on the basis of oil revenues, and gas revenues and revenues from the sale of minerals and metals, the Russian economy began to get back on its feet again.

Now, the the main chapter of NATO expansion started before that. [In] 1999, they had a conference where a whole lot of states were kind of putting on a membership plan, and 2004, all those states have joined, which included some of the Central European states, but also the Baltic states. And, you know, they're not Mexico, right? The imperialist power they're worrying about is not over the border in the United States. They're in the Baltic states, and therefore the imperialist power they're worrying about which has invaded them at various times or received ownership of them, thanks to secret deals between Stalin and Hitler. is Russia. So you can see the logic for the Baltic states. My understanding is that first of all, there was no Membership Action Plan and never has been for Ukraine - ever. I mean, obviously, NATO was anxious to build up a military relationship with Ukraine, it was doing that even when Yanukovych was President even before that. That's a long standing thing. But the weapons supply until the last year was absolutely negligible. And the progress in terms of Ukraine moving towards a membership was negligible. That was complicated by the European Union. Ukraine desperately wanted EU membership as did Turkey. And neither of those countries was ever going to be allowed to get anywhere near that by Germany, and France in

particular. And yes, it's true that the Western powers did not want a strong Russian state.

But it's also true that the Western powers increasingly in this period from 2000 onwards, when Putin as the president, saw Russia as a gendarme, which they could use to maintain social control in the former Soviet territories. Chechnya's has been mentioned. Russian attacked Georgia in 2008. But I think primarily in Syria and Ukraine. And of course, the Russian intervention in Syria came after the war in Ukraine started in 2014. But it's very clear that the message from the Western powers was "you can support Bashar Al Assad. You can massacre as many Syrians as you like. You can use chemical weapons And you can do everything else, but just keep away from the Western air bases in the Middle East, and you will be fine." And you know, much as they all deny that there is an arrangement with spheres of influence, that is a policy about spheres of influence. And the same was true actually with Ukraine. And it's notable that all the sanctions that were imposed on Russia after 2014, were imposed with respect to the annexation of Crimea, which was something that made the Western powers nervous, and they regarded as unacceptable. There were no sanctions related to the support for the right wing and fascist elements that were put in charge of these so called People's Republics. Now I'm going to be quick. And I've got two more bits to this. One is the short term cause of the new phase of the war.

I mean, the Minsk agreement was never going to work. People who follow this more closely than I do, that's, that's their opinion, and I haven't read into it, I'm sure they're right. You know, the agreement was that there would be a measure of autonomy, and that Russian forces would withdraw. But it's not specified in so called Minsk, to which way round that's going to happen. So it was never gonna work. And it didn't work and [unclear], actually, just when the current phase of war started, wrote a very good article, explaining that. I think that's very, very worth reading. And I think the I think it's significant that during the last couple of years. And when we're talking about very tragic and difficult things that a lot of Ukrainians said to me in the course of March, well, we always knew this was going to happen. Not all, but a lot of a lot of people said, "Oh, we never thought this was going to happen." But some people said, "we always knew this going to happen." Well, I can tell you now, I did not know it was gonna happen. But I also don't think a lot of people in the Kremlin knew it was gonna happen. I think this was one possible option, which was obviously there for the Kremlin to take. And I think this is the way that the Kremlin operates, both in economic and in military terms as they keep their options open. I think Putin is extremely skilled in this respect. They keep it up.

So I think there's always one option, but I don't think it was the favorite one. And I think there was much more concentration when all those Russian troops were gathering on the border. And, you know, the US. The CIA, to be fair to them, were saying it's going to be an invasion. And I think at that point, that what was definitely going to happen was something with respect to the "People's Republics", they were handing out huge numbers of passports, more than a million [Russian] passports were given out in 2021, to citizens of the Republics, so that they would be citizens of the Russian Federation. And that trick was played in Georgia, you know, "well, we're just moving our peacekeepers in to protect our citizens, that's all." And this was all going on, there were changes in the administration of those republics, there was a lot more direct Russian involvement in the administration, to all that was happening. But I think also that as a result of things that have happened in Russia - I have no time to speak about the protest movements, the failure of the Kremlin to deal with those, the the deteriorating condition of the economy, due to up until now, the low prices of oil that followed the 2015, crash, all sorts of other things. I think the Kremlin's domestic agenda was driving it more and more into a kind of ideological nationalism, which was on speed, if you like, I mean, it's always been there. But it's been massively ratcheted up over the past year or so. The much, much more extreme forms of repression domestically. And I think it's all that that plays into the decision then, which, of course, was a catastrophic.

You know, there was a catastrophic, from the criminal point of view, underestimation of how Ukraine as a country would respond, but all that played into the decision to invade on the 24th of February. Now, I'm gonna finish just very quickly this seventh point about what the national question means in the 21st century. I mean, it's more to raise a question and to tell you what my answers and answers are because I don't know what they are. For many years, I had thought that the education that I had had as a Marxist about the the issue of national liberation was wanting. And the reason I thought it was wanting more than anything was that I couldn't see any progressive role being played by the bourgeoisie in countries, whether in Latin America or in Africa, or, or whether, you know, bureaucratic formations like in Vietnam, particularly. I spent a lot of time looking at the Vietnamese regime and the role. I couldn't see any really socially progressive politics or anything to do with what I would think of socialism coming from these regimes.

So I thought that the part of the schema which was prevalent in the Marxist movement in the early 20th century about not only that nations had a right to resist colonialism, but that there was a progressive aspect to that nationalism, I thought was wrong. And I still think we've moved past that period of history, we're in the globalized form of capitalism, where empires are Neo colonialist and economic rather than direct very often, but I don't see anything progressive. Inherently, you know, I don't see very much progressive, just, you know, from the evidence before our eyes of any of these national bourgeoisie these that find themselves resisting colonialism. However, I think more than ever now actually is a result of the events of the last few months. I do think there is a right to resist, which is something that I would embrace as part of my socialist understanding of the world. And that is not conditional. And it's not limited by the fact of however, I might see the bourgeoisie in Ukraine or any other country. I mean, I think that right to resist is there for me as much in Ukraine as it is in Palestine. Or in Ireland, which is not a hot war, thank God. But I mean, that's something that's obviously concerned us all our lives being involved with socialist politics in the UK. And there's plenty of reactionary politics in Ireland and plenty in Palestine. But I don't see that that affects this right to resist. And that's been a kind of political anchor for me over the past few months. What that says about outcomes, and what that says about the the course of the war is another subject really, to what we're speaking about today, so I'll leave it there. And sorry for going on a bit long, and thanks for listening.

Charles Rachlis

I speak on behalf of the International Leninist Trotskyist Tendency, Communist Workers Group. I think the discussion on the national question and permanent revolution is essential. Because, in my understanding, Lenin came around to Trotsky's permanent revolution and understood that the National bourgeoisie in the semi colonial countries could no longer carry out the tasks of the national democratic revolution. And, and that, therefore it is necessary to combine the struggle for national liberation with the struggle for socialist revolution. And thus we raise again the position of the Bolsheviks for an independent Soviet Ukraine. And for such a independent Soviet Ukraine to actually establish the internationalist unity it needs to win, it must also recognize the right for an independent Soviet Donbass and Crimea. Then the question is also about the the question of a proxy war, which really wasn't raised too much in here, and the role of the West because much of the left has been saying "well, Ukraine, of course, it does have the right to resist", and we argue for that in our articles, but we point out that that the Ukrainian bourgeoisie is not a lot... let me backtrack a little bit: The struggle for the defeat of the Russian imperialist has to go hand in hand with the struggle against the the the control of Ukraine by NATO and that and semi colonial countries dependent countries cannot be independent of one imperialist bloc or the other. And that because Ukraine today is a dependent proxy and puppet government of NATO, we have to point our guns as the international working class, both at NATO and at Russia, and that, when we talk about the resistance, we have to put that in class terms. We can't just say abstractly, that there's a patriotic

front of all Ukraine, that's going to defend and win Ukrainian sovereignty, unless we fight for the independence of the working class in Ukraine. And of course, that's the task of the internationalist workers movement to create a workers international. And so we need a new Zimmerwald that says we turn the inter imperialist war into a class war. Now, many people will say, and I've heard it on many of these discussions, not with your group with Tempest and others, etc, that this is not a proxy war, because there's no western boots on the ground. But I think that that gives some sort of cover to the arguments of Biden and NATO, etc, that, "Oh, we're not involved, we're just sending, you know, some arms, and we're giving a little bit of support and, and a little bit of intelligence." But I think that the way that wars are conducted, now, the left has to be a little more aware of the nature of hybrid wars, of proxy wars, of the ability of the gangster on 12th Street to put the small gangs on Seventh Street to war against the their enemies on Fifth Street. In other words, the United States, Eastern Western Europe, have have their intentions to encircle and crush Russia, or to at least control it, which, to us is an inter imperialist struggle, and that Ukraine has been thrown straight in the middle of that.

[Also], even though there's been some discussion of the lesser role of the Nazis that rose up, and I would disagree and say that they were the ones that did the sniping in the in the Maidan from from the earlier comment, and I think that's been documented. But that, that, because the capitalist, Ukraine was not able to meet the crisis of the economy, that the people face since restoration. And I think this, this applies across the former Soviet republics, the National question has been reemerged. And because the capitalist, capitalist governments there cannot meet the people's needs. The right wing nationalists have a foot in, and they're able to do that, and make their links with the West. And and therefore we need to assert the national program of self determination as linked to permanent revolution. So I'm sure that's my two minutes and and hopefully, there's a second round. Thank you.

Cheryl Zuur

For me, we can't get around the fact that involved in the right to resist is the right to have arms, and to defend yourself with a gun. And this is one of the things that I find most atrocious about all the calls for peace and negotiations. Again, as John mentioned, it's as if the Ukrainians have no voice of their own. It's very much it's as if they have no right to their own experience. When I think about the weapon of rape in Ukraine right now, which of course, has been a time tested tactic of war. And the fact that pregnant Ukrainian women are not able to get an abortion in the countries where they've had to flee to, for their lives. It's just, it makes me sick. And one of the things that I would say if I ever have a chance to say it to someone who has that position about "peace, oh, peace in Ukraine" is "so if you are being raped by a Russian soldier, would you prefer to have a gun to shoot him and stop the rape of perhaps your child? Or would you call for peace, my brother?" It's absurd. So in any case, I just want to make that point that the right to resist essentially means the right to defend yourself with weapons and the right to get those weapons wherever you can get them from.

Bradley Mayer

The perspective that the Russo Ukraine war is analogous to Zimmerwald and 1915, and the First World War is actually false. I have no doubt that the NATO powers think they're fighting a proxy war, using Ukrainians. That's their point of view. But a Marxist point of view, which of course, begins with a class analysis doesn't necessarily just simply end and stop with a class analysis. Because the Russo Ukraine war is a war, formally, between two capitalist powers. One is a non imperial capitalist power. Ukraine has been traditionally oppressed by a new imperialist capitalist power, Russia. And that's the present military and war situation.... I'll just end off with a class analysis. Since we're dealing with a war between oppressed and oppressor nations, both of them capitalist, we have to realize that the form of the conflict also involves non class criteria. So, of

course, we begin with a class analysis. But including that of Russia. But the limits to that involve the actual nature of the conflict as it presents itself to us in reality.

Charles Rachlis

I would argue that in this in this war, the inter imperialist conflict predominates over the National War, and that if the Ukraine working class is going to survive, it has to turn its guns, both against Zelinsky. And against NATO, as well as against Russia. And I think that's a large piece of the debate that we're having on the left. Obviously, I'm not talking about with the Putin pals, that's another discussion. But in in this side of the left, that's where we have to take the debate.

Simon Pirani

Stanley's questions was about the situation regarding the attitude to the war, here in the UK I find quite difficult to judge. I agree with you that the internet, which is so positive and important for those of us who believe in human society being a thing, is such a marvelous thing in many ways. It can also produce incredibly distorting impressions. And I think the presence of those Kremlin-repeating people is very, very large on the internet. But I think here in the UK, as well as in your experience it's a bit smaller in real life. I always poo pooed those who said, "Oh, you know, Hillary Clinton lost the election to Trump because of Russian bots." I always thought that was nonsense. Obviously, you are all in the States, or many of you are and you know much more about this than I do. But I always responded by saying "no, the Democratic Party lost the election because they failed to appeal to black and working class voters. And you can't blame it on Russian bots." However I do think that Kremlin propaganda is a thing. And one of the things I wanted to say in response was in discussion, there are real points of substance and real points of analysis. But also, we're conducting a discussion about those under conditions where there's just an enormous weight, both of Kremlin propaganda, but also people who repeat it, either willingly and knowingly or not willingly, or not knowingly. And I think that's a problem you have to live with. The other thing I'd say about the solidarity activity here, and this is a bit of advertising, if you'll excuse me, that I've put in the chat, that's a link to a thing that I personally have been involved in, which I think is one of the forms of solidarity that can truly be effective, because in the first couple of months, lots of people here went on demonstrations, I think ordinary working class people here by and large, had a very sympathetic take to Ukraine. And you're ready to take refugees into their homes, all sorts of other measures, by which you can see the reaction to the arrival of refugees here in London. And lots of other small things. But when we get past that initial thing, and I think the war is going to drag on, I think that's a very likely scenario.

I've been working with other friends to highlight what's going on in the areas that are occupied by Russia, and to try to devise forms of solidarity with the labor movement and with civil society in those areas. What do we do in response to a problem? Of course, we have a zoom call. And in fact, we had one last Monday, which was great. We had a representatives of a number of human rights organizations, we got a second one on Thursday, which is with the Eastern human rights group, which actually its title doesn't really describe it fully. It's come out of the workers movement, and was set up by trade union organizers who are from parts of Donetsk and Lugansk, which are actually now they've had to move and they come from several vignettes can lose your chance, and then are basically in other parts of Ukraine. And so we got a call on Thursday, I do invite anybody who's interested to come and listen to what those friends have to say, and we're going to try from that to devise forms of solidarity, certainly circulating information, will be one thing that we know needs doing about what's going on in the Russian occupied areas, which I think says a lot about the character of Russian imperialism, and the character of the Russian war. And so it's important, both from the very practical point of view, and also plays into conversations about what is Russia doing? Just before I get on to that question, I mean, I do think there are a number of things that have come

up here, which I would put under the heading of, you know, things that are said by the Kremlin, and then repeated. I'm not accusing anybody here of repeating Kremlin propaganda. That's not what I'm saying at all. But I think there are arguments that are repeatedly cycled through the left, which are actually very close to the ones that are put by by the Kremlin, and clearly have some real significance in reality.

For that reason, I think, the most serious one that needs to be argued with is this issue of, is this a proxy war? And I agree with Bradley about this. Clearly, there's a sense in which yes, it's a proxy war. Clearly there are people sitting in the US State Department, clearly they're being Brussels, clearly there are people sitting in Whitehall here in the UK, clearly thinking "how they can use this situation to the advantage of the various governments that they that they belong to?" But if we then take that to mean that that is the guiding hand behind the Ukrainian resistance, that's obviously nonsense. I mean, the American position that was put to Zelensky, in the first week of the war - not only is that position not aligned with a position of working class people in eastern Ukraine, who went out, trying to fight tanks to their bare hands. But it's not even aligned with the position of Zelensky, the position of the US State Department at the start of the war was "Hello, we will offer you government in exile, you can come here to the US because we expect that Russia is going to occupy Kyiv." and Zelensky's response was, "No, thanks. Please send me some weapons." And he stayed where he was. And I think that was, to the extent that political actions are important in this thing, I think that was an important one.

So there's no alignment between the Ukraine government on this and the American State Department. And I mean, there's lots and lots and lots of evidence that before this invasion in February, and since there are powerful elements in the ruling class of the Big Western powers, I mean, I'd say France, Germany and Italy very openly, but also in the US. I think the ruling class is divided on this. I think those elements and I think they're predominant as things stand, would like to bring Ukraine to the negotiating table sooner rather than later. And, you know, the fact that bits of Ukraine are occupied by Russia at that point is a barrier, they're going to try and get over. At the moment, I don't see any way over it. Because I think the level of resistance is in the way that somebody talked about. There are more recruits than weapons. And, in fact, I had some Ukrainian friends visiting who are liberals rather than socialist people I know, through journalism. And they were saying, they are actually very worried because that what happened was when they ran out of sort of army uniforms, and the ability to bring people in the army bases, at a certain point at the beginning of the war, they just started giving everybody guns, and now there are enormous quantity of guns in private hands in Kyiv. And my friends saw it from their point of view as a big problem, you know, domestic violence and so on are being settled with weapons in hand. Then we saw this in the Balkans. I think we probably say in every war, this is not something to celebrate. It's just what happens. But I yeah, I think the problem with the the proxy war thing is that it assumes that the agency here is the Western powers, and neither the Ukrainian government nor the Ukrainian people, whereas I'd say they are the chief agents who have been resisting this Russian invasion.

Charles said that we have to point our guns at NATO, as well as at Russia. I really don't know what you're talking about. And I'm afraid this sort of loose phraseology that we hear in meetings when, let's face it, we're all sitting or most people in this call, as far as I can see, you're sitting quite comfortably in countries where there's no war going on. I think, to talk about which direction we're going to point our guns in, in this conversation is really not helpful. And I'd say it reflects the sort of sloganeering that we've all been used to. But I think most people here have spent many years in the movement. And that slogan doesn't have any meaning in the present situation.

Likewise, I'd say to speak about an independent Soviet Donbass and Crimea, when the only versions of Donbass and Crimea that are that are available, are these versions led by Russian government agents and fascist gangsters in Donetsk and Lugansk. You know, to my mind that's empty

sloganeering and doesn't mean anything.

A quick other point raised by Charles, it is not clear: Who did the sniping on Maidan? It just isn't clear. And there's been a huge dispute raging among academics in Canada about this, if you just go to the Twitter feeds of David Marples, or Iven Katschenovski, they were arguing about it again yesterday. But these guys spend their lives reading Ukrainian government documents and press much more than I do. It just isn't clear. So let's not say it's clear when it's not clear. There were guns all round, obviously, on Maidan, we know that. We know that the state forces were under orders to use them and that in many cases, they lost their nerve. And that was part of the reason that the state ceased to function. But yeah, let's be a little less certain, where there's clearly uncertainty.

Okay, so a couple of other things in the sort of category of arguments that are thrown up repeatedly by Putinists, or maybe not Putinists, just kind of people who long for the Soviet Union, even 30 years after it's gone. Stanley asked "you constantly hear the argument. 'well, Yanukovych was in office, and it was a coup. And what was the role of Victoria Nuland?'" I mean, I can safely say the role was just zero. The conversation which has been made famous via WikiLeaks - yeah, I'm sure it happened. And I'm sure there's a lot of people in the US State Department who would have loved it if there was a right wing coup, but I it doesn't take an awfully high level of knowledge about what actually happened at the time to see that it wasn't ordered by Victoria Nuland. I mean, just on a kind of colloquial basis, there were 200,000 people out on the streets. But what's very important to add is that it was two weeks, and it was Ukrainian winter. I mean, it's really cold. It's minus 10, minus 15. You know, we know what CIA inspired plots look like. You know, there are a small number of armed people in a rather chaotic country somewhere, usually in Latin America, who are well motivated, well organized. And they take advantage of the chaos to step in. I mean, it's painfully clear that's not what happened. The 200,000 people out in the streets in the middle of winter, and the the regional demonstrations, somebody mentioned Volodymyr Ishenka. I blow hot and cold with his research. I think his research and sociological research is very good. I am less enthusiastic about his interpretation. He's somebody I've known for a long time, We've had very strong disagreements about the interpretation. But I mean, one of the things his research showed is the very, very high level of activity, because one of the things [is] "it was all in Kyiv". Well, clearly, it wasn't all in Kyiv. And I think some of a lot of his research has shown that very, very clearly, you know, this is a real massive event.

So again, it's about "do Ukrainians have agency?" And clearly this kind of Victoria Nuland theory of history is that they don't. You can still read on the internet about how the Russian Revolution in 1917 was cooked up by half a dozen agents of Germany. I mean, let's move on.

Okay. So, Virginia asked about the migrants, the short answer is I don't know the details. I know that they didn't have what they wanted, which was the Association Agreement with the EU. That was what the argument was about with Yanukovych. There's very good research on this again, you know, by scholars. There are people who've worked on this now.

So just very quickly, some of the other questions. I totally agree with Cheryl and with Ted, you know, the issue of "what does the right to resist mean, and how do we theorize in the 21st century, the question of national self determination?" And in discussing it with friends and comrades, I don't have any simple answers to that. I think they have some answers to what was Russia playing at? What was the aim of this whole thing? So firstly, I do not think that there was an economic issue here, neither in 2014, nor in 2022. I do not think that the annexation of Crimea or the, or the support for the militants in Donbass brought any economic advantage to the Russian Federation. On the contrary, actually, because I was doing that work for the Oxford Institute for Energy studies to a job that involves speaking with business people in Ukraine and Russia a lot. And every single one of the

Russian business people I was in touch with at that time, or had a conversation with at some conference or whatever, they hated it, because it was clear that they were gonna get sanctioned, if they went ahead in the way that they did with the annexation of Crimea. And that was a disaster from the point of view of Russian business. So there was a real collision between the short term economic interests of Russian capital, which at that point was to try to start building the recovery from the '09 financial crisis and get their businesses back operating and get back into some kind of sync with Western business, and the political aims, which were to do with corralling Russians, and to do with the fact that I think in the end this is another point the Russian Empire cannot live without Ukraine. I think that's politically and that's why we're now we've had all this stuff about the Russia world and how Ukrainians are really Russian and so on.

Denys Pilash

I'm from Social Movement, a socialist group in Ukraine, and I am now in Ukraine. And I wanted to comment on Simon's answers, or some of the questions that were put, for instance, about that. Simon mentioned, but hadn't elaborated about the migrant question. So actually, up to the signing of us rotation agreement with Ukraine. Ukrainians had no status in European countries and this made millions of people who were forced to leave the country because there was no job after.

Yes, we had millions of people who had to leave the country to work abroad because of the deindustrialization processes and general economic collapse in the 90s. And I'm from personally from the carapace as it was originally, it was mentioned by Simon. That, actually, not only Hungarians, ethnic Hungarians got Hungarian passports, but also non Hungarians here, just in order to get legal jobs in the European Union. And this is one of the material issues that were driving the people for supporting this association agreement with the EU.

But in general, there were also lots of other grievances that I would say were very common for all these protests and uprisings that we see this wave after the 2008 economic crisis throughout the world that I think is the most iconic were probably the Arab Spring, but we had different mobilizations throughout the world. And Ukraine was no exception. So people were driven by lots of social, economic, political issues. And when people just invoke Victoria Nuland to explain what happened in Ukraine. Ah, wow, it's so lame, because actually, you should know none of these people know, for instance, the name of [unclear] who was a student who was killed in a police department. For as the name of the village, [unclear], a bunch of men, including a policeman, raped and killed the women. And all all this added to, for instance, a general mood against the police violence here.

And so that dispersal of first Maidan protest, the so called student protest, that was the last drop, and it was so so powerful this reaction from the people precisely because the issue of police violence was, and in many cases still is very pressuring in in Ukraine. And then we had the 16th January laws that effectively outlawed any kind of independent activity, including that on behalf of grassroots organizations and unions.

And it was a way paving the way to something like Russia, because authoritarian regime in Belarus, and in some way, it was a point of no return that forced many people, including on the left to support the protests, because there was no other option. The other option was becoming Russia controlled, very authoritarian state. And we can see that that Russian imperialism, it really acts as some kind of new gender or of Europe. Not not so much of Europe but has postponed and actually suppressing protests, popular protests in Belarusian, but also beyond and support the Lord. Some authoritarian regimes, like say Myanmar dictatorship butchering 1000 people. Even the most recent example, the Rajapaksa clan in Sri Lanka, there were two institutions they were turning for financial and political support recently, and that was the IMF and Russia.

So, Russian Imperialism is an agent on its own. It's just just as bad as any other Imperials. So it's it's really for many people left, they are really trapped into this America centric kind of worldview. It denies the existence of any other imperialism, or sees them as something that is like a counterweight to their own. And so it's the lesser evil, but actually, it's a continuation. And it's quite important to be consistent and to be against all Imperial aggression, be it Russia in Ukraine, or Erdogan, against the Kurds, for Saudi Arabia. Now, I, I think Biden is coming to Saudi Arabia. So it's a very legitimate. One about the things Simon was saying about because in there when he was talking first, he was saying about other struggles as well, like Palestinian, and I'll send the link of Congress of the Polish left wing party which they had organized the panel with Ukrainians, but also Palestinians from the BDS movement and Kurdish Turkish HDP party. So I will show you the ways how they link the struggles together. That's the first thing and the second one is about your intervention, the discussion, because you said about the about the rape. It's a very good point. And in the European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine, we have two manifestos about the situation one is organized by[indistinct] as well one by the Ukrainian feminists with the help of [indistinct] about self determination and right to struggle in the military struggle.

So I'll send the links and if any of you want to sign or give it to other feminists organization or, or any groups who would be willing to sign in the US, that would be good. And the second one is about the abortion rights in especially, it consists the ones in Poland, because as many of you may know, in Poland, abortion is very restricted. And we have the biggest groups of migrants of refugees, Ukrainian women, which have like, in the peak time, it was about 3 million people. Now it's less because some of them are in other European countries, something back to Ukraine. But still, it's over like maybe 2 million people, mostly women, so and the problem of abortion is really big. And the organization called Our job is granting abortion without borders. Just get financial help from the French government recently, just for organizing abortions abroad, or the pharmacal, pharmacological abortions for women. So I'll send the links for both of the manifestos. So if any, any of you want to sign or any organization use, you know, which one is signed, we'll be very grateful for that. And there was the question from Virginia, about the migrants. And then it's partially partially talked about it. But I would say from the Polish perspective, even if just about 214 215, there was about 1000s of Ukrainians working in Poland. And even before the war, it was about 1 million, 1 million workers in Poland, Ukrainian workers. So we have to see that. And Poland was not not the only country which Ukraine is can you talk about Spain, but the big country would be Ukrainian, migrant and workers community is Portugal, which not everyone knows. And there's also Germany. So there was, even if they didn't have the abilities, like being part of the EU, there was, like, for example, in Poland, they had they were able to work thanks to the agreement between Poland and Ukraine. So it was like a country to country agreement. Not not. It doesn't have anything to do with you at that point. So that's about the migrants situation. I think that's that's about it for now. Maybe I'll think about something later.

Cheryl Zuur

As I said, at the beginning of the meeting, we will have another forum, a panel discussion or presentation in a few weeks on. Some people call it the brown red Alliance. We are calling it the influence of fascist ideas amongst the left Stalinist ideas in the left to this day, and how that's especially influenced the situation Ukraine and the left's position on it. So I think with that, we are going to close this meeting. And again, thank you to everyone who participated. And thank you. Ted's raising, you said Thank you, Simon, for your presentation. So as I said at the beginning of the meeting, we will have another forum, a panel discussion or presentation in a few weeks on. Some people call it the brown red Alliance. We are calling it the influence of fascist ideas amongst the left Stalinist ideas in the left to this day and how that's especially influenced the situation Ukraine and the left's position on it. So I think with that we are going to close this meeting. And again, thank you

to everyone who participated and thank you, Simon.

Cheryl Zuur
Simon Pirani
Charles Rachlis
Bradley Mayer
Denys Pilash

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P.S.

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