

Sweden: Peace at any price, and let the Ukrainians pay?

Friday 28 October 2022, by [FAHLGREN Martin](#), [SVENSSON Anders](#) (Date first published: 1 October 2022).

Sweden's Socialistisk Politik group and their newspaper Internationalen propose a curious 'peace' for Eastern Europe. A peace that is good for Russian imperialism and bad for Ukrainians.

In today's society it is difficult to find anyone claiming to be in favor of war and in opposition to peace. At least outside the most extreme right-wing nationalist circles. In every military conflict, both sides will typically claim that their goal is peace. But of course the question is always, on what terms.

When the Bolsheviks in Russia during the First World War put forward the slogan of unconditional "Peace", it was directed against their own imperialist government. Only in a similar situation, as part of a defeatist policy where the defeat of one's own government and country is seen as the lesser evil, can the peace slogan have a subversive power. Even in today's Russia this might work if concretized as an unconditional demand on the Putin regime to immediately cease all acts of war against Ukraine and withdraw their troops.

But from a safe Swedish or European horizon, in general demanding peace in Ukraine means avoiding choosing sides in an imperialist war of conquest. This equals betrayal of the Ukraine people.

Ukraine did not ask for this war. The Ukrainian people are waging a just war for persisting as a sovereign nation. Ukraine has no other basic demands on Russia than for the withdrawal of its troops from Ukraine territory, giving up its imperialist claims and terminate the war.

Socialistisk Politik and Internationalen have time after time repeated that they have taken a clear stand against Putin's war and consistently demanded that the Russian troops must leave Ukraine. But at the same time they have since the war began spoken with forked tongue. In the statement from the SP steering committee from February 24, the same day that the invasion started, they write : "Both the Putin regime as well as NATO and the United States are responsible for what is happening, both sides have been inciting a war that once again is showing the bloodstained dead end of nationalism."

When the SP steering committee insinuate that Ukraine has been pushed by NATO into "the bloodstained dead end of nationalism", they pretend that there is no decisive difference between the reactionary nationalism that is employed when claiming superiority of the own nation, attacking oppressed nations and peoples - and the revolutionary nationalism that has been an element in practically every war of liberation during the 20th century.

To Putin it is essential to eradicate the Ukraine nation, its culture and its language. In the same way, the Ukraine struggle for freedom requires even socialists to embrace a defence of the nation per se. Not considering this aspect would be to hand over this issue and the whole fight for independence to

the right wing nationalists. Only by Ukrainian socialists consistently defending the Ukraine nation they are able to show how attacks on the working class, Russian speakers, Roma people, women and LGBTQ activists will undermine the struggle against Russian imperialism.

Some SP spokesmen have defined the war as "inter-imperialist", and used that as an excuse for not taking a clear stand for supporting Ukraine. In *Internationalen*, articles black-painting the Ukrainian side have been abundant, trying to depict the Ukrainian regime as equally authoritarian as the Russian, and express the view that a victory for Ukraine will not be possible at all.

You can see some parallels with how rape victims are often portrayed in the courtroom. How was she dressed ? Was she drunk ? Which signals was she displaying ? And how did her friends act ? The fact that such questions are posed at all is a way of saying that the victim is also responsible for what happened. And that the perpetrator is in reality also a victim.

While the war is under way, intensive Russian preparations are made to completely annex the Donbass provinces. Through referendums, the remaining population will be allowed to vote for becoming part of Russia. But everybody outside Russia know that the referendums are a farce and that the result has been decided in advance. Millions of people have already been forced to flee from eastern Ukraine. Remaining are the old and sick that have not had any chance to escape and part of the minority that still support the pro-Russian separatists. More than a million people, among them over 300,000 children, have been abducted to Russia, where an unknown number have ended up in so called "filtration camps" where they are often interrogated under torture.

A cease-fire would in the current situation mean that the annexation of Donbass can be completed in peace and quiet. Russia could exploit an armistice by rounding up those that still want to belong to Ukraine and incarcerate or liquidate them.

"Instead, Swedish foreign policy should in this context be centered on de-escalation and negotiations for an immediate cease-fire in order to save lives, and a possible peace based on more or less poor compromises, but with a chance for reconstruction - and a bit of democratic prospects for future reestablishment of ties between working people in order to improve their conditions. To instead hope for the ongoing bloodstained and devastating war to go on until Ukraine and their western allies triumph over a crushed Russian military power plus an overthrown regime in Moscow, is that more realistic ?" (Håkan Blomqvist, *Internationalen* 15/2022)

When Håkan Blomqvist speaks of "peace based on more or less poor compromises, but with a chance for reconstruction", it seems like implicitly he sees a partition of Ukraine as the realistic compromise solution to the conflict. And "reconstruction" will then be all about Russia getting a possibility to consolidating their positions and preparing for the next step - to complete the total conquering of Kiev and the rest of Ukraine, something Putin and his spokesmen have repeated time after time is the obvious goal. A necessary element in restoring the Russian empire where Ukraine constitutes a central piece of the puzzle.

And with a completed annexation of Donbas, confirmed by a peace agreement forced upon Ukraine, the way could be wide open for Russia to go on and devour even Georgia and Moldavia.

How would a "a bit of democratic prospects" appear in annexed Donbas ? Like in Russia ? Without doubt you can predict that the constantly shrinking openings that still exist for the opposition in Russia will still be far more permissive than what will be possible in the annexed regions for many years to come.

So the essence seems to be that SP wants peace at any price. The millions of refugees from eastern

Ukraine are of course to regret, but a necessary sacrifice for peace.

It is better that the population of the occupied regions live on their knees than for the war to keep causing death. It is better that Russia liquidates a couple of millions that refuse to give up the thought of an independent Ukraine than for thousand of people die in the war. It is better with a Ukraine under the Russian iron heel than one that is associated with the European Union and NATO. The goal must be to appease Putin at any price so that he will not start a nuclear war when the military fortune disfavors him.

In their statement from March 26, the SP steering committee sees as its task to "contribute to an honest peace initiative that opposes both Putin's war of aggression and a fatal military escalation. We stand for an immediate end of the acts of warfare. It is unavoidable that the Ukrainian defense requests international military assistance, but this is not a burden that socialists can assume. What we can contribute instead is everything from humanitarian aid in order to maintain and resume ties between people on different sides, oppose hatred between peoples and nationalist militarization of our societies."

What is meant concretely when saying that international military aid is not "a burden that socialists can assume" is still unclear and fuzzy - which is hardly a coincidence. It goes without saying that socialists in Sweden cannot by themselves provide Ukraine with arms, and the ridiculously small humanitarian aid we could provide could at the most have a symbolic significance.

But what Swedish socialists can above all offer, that the Ukrainian left have been so articulate about that they wish from socialist in the West, is political support for the struggle of Ukraine. And that must amount to a political position in favor of arms support to Ukraine by whomever is willing to give it. As should be obvious to everyone, stopping arms deliveries to Ukraine would mean that the resistance to the Russian invasion would soon wither away.

An excellent initiative that socialists in Sweden could support is the one that the action group Stop Putin's War Against Ukraine publicized in Dagens Nyheter on August 24, where three of the most wellknown former representatives of the major peace organization Svenska Freds demand that five percent of the military budgets in the Western nations should be earmarked for unconditional military assistance to Ukraine. If old peace activists can "assume this burden", why should not SP be able to do it ?

In a situation where you can see that the European front for support to Ukraine is wavering, when the issue with the Russian gas is likely to make the right wing change their position the coming winter, then the political support from the left for arming the Ukrainian freedom struggle more important than ever.

The demand for peace at any price in the war against Ukraine also makes you wonder how SP will react to future imperialist wars and armed conflicts. You can of course always talk about de-escalation, cease-fire, peace and negotiations, without having to go into concrete details. It is a comfortable position that can always be put forward.

But is that the way the SP leadership contemplates the future ? Is perhaps the war in Ukraine an exception where the slogans of peace are only brought to the fore because the US and NATO at this point have lined up behind the defense of Ukraine ? Or is it only in smaller conflicts where Russia is not involved that SP will be able to take a stand ? Or are the demands for peace and negotiations a universal solution that can be applied to for instance the conflict between Israel and Palestine ? To the civil war in Syria ?

Håkan Blomqvist says in the same article that has been referred to earlier in this text that Ukraine has the right to defend their country with arms in hand, and that they have the right to receive arms deliveries from whoever is willing to give it. But at the same time that he acknowledges this right, he is apparently an opponent of various countries sending arms, since he sees it as totally unrealistic that Ukraine will be able to win the war. Instead he sees a negotiated solution as the only option. Likewise, when Alex Fuentes writes about the Spanish "anti-war movement" that opposes arms deliveries to Ukraine "where there is already a superabundance of arms from NATO that prolong the war". (Internationallén 26/2022). In other words, only by stopping the arms deliveries to Ukraine can the war be shortened, by the Ukrainian government being forced to the negotiation table, where they will need to bend to the Russian demands.

So at the same time that Ukraine has "the right to defend their sovereignty", and "the right to receive arms deliveries from whoever is willing to give them", SP is simultaneously against all arms deliveries. Or, they have at least never wanted to detail exactly which arms they believe Ukraine should have, or from whom they should come in that case. How does that equation add up ?

So the Ukrainian "right" to defend themselves is apparently not much worth !

The history of the workers movement, socialism and the anti-imperialist liberation struggle might well be seen as a series of repeated defeats, in which the oppressed at best have won temporary and partial victories. What is the consequence for how to take a stand on such battles ?

Most socialists have probably understood that we must always consistently support any just struggle, even when we can see that the odds for success are very bad. It should not be the task of socialists to encourage from the outside striking workers to negotiate or agree to bad compromises as long as the struggle is going on. Only those that are fighting may themselves decide when it is time to give up or sit down at the negotiation table.

But in the case of Ukraine, SP has obviously made the assessment that armed resistance must be ruled out as being too painful. In spite of Ukrainian socialists not sharing that opinion.

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P.S.

This contribution was submitted as a motion to the yearly national conference of Socialistisk Politik in Sweden on October 16, 2022. It was rejected by a majority of the delegates.

Translated from Swedish by a member of ENSU.