

As ITUC meets in Melbourne, Ukrainian, Polish unionists call on global union confederation to expel pro-war Russian affiliate

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Ukrainian and Polish trade unions are calling on delegates to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) world congress to expel the pro-war Russian Federation of Trade Unions (FNPR) from its ranks.

The ITUC — the world's largest global trade union confederation, with 331 affiliated organisations in more than 160 countries — is currently hosting its fifth world congress in Melbourne, which runs from November 17–22.

In a letter to ITUC general secretary Sharon Burrow, the heads of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU), the All-Ukrainian Union of Workers' Solidarity ("VOLYA"), the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) and the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarność" of Poland outlined their stance on the issue.

They wrote: "Russia's assault on sovereign Ukraine began in 2014 with the annexation of the Crimea peninsula. Despite the general international discord and disdain for such actions by the [Vladimir] Putin regime, its acolytes were left unscathed and allowed to sit at the tables of various international organisations and bodies.

"This was the case with the Russian Federation of Trade Unions (FNPR) led by Mikhail Shmakov, which openly supported the annexation of Crimea, humiliated Ukrainian trade unions and attempted to dominate other trade union organisations in the region.

"This year, in February, open warfare was started again by Russia, raining fire upon and destroying not only the falsely contested eastern regions of Ukraine, but also the homes and lives of all Ukrainians throughout the country, forcing the displacement and migration of millions of its citizens, destroying homes, demolishing futures, killing many thousands of people in a blind fury of hatred and desire for destruction.

"Again, the FNPR, as a cog in Putin's war machine, has served him well with its full support expressed so openly in various statements full of hate speech, multiplying Russian war propaganda, spreading lies and threats against anyone who dares to oppose 'Russian peace'.

"It is not the role of trade unions to engage militarily, but we must take our own stand, challenging injustice and opposing aggression. Ultimately, it is working people, trade union members, who pay the highest price for any war pipedream of power-hungry dictators and their propagandists and supporters.

“But it is the role of trade unions to work for a peaceful world, to abide by the principles enshrined in the statutes of our international organisations seeking peace, security and protection for our members — but never at any cost...

“There is no place for warmongers in the ranks of the international labour movement. There is no bank to launder Russian blood money and no pipeline worth the lives of millions condemned to live in the shadow of Russian domination and die at the hands of various Putin henchmen, including the FNPR.”

Noting that the FNPR took the decision to suspend its ITUC membership due to the supposed “one-sidedness and bias in the presentation and consideration of issues related to the military operation in Ukraine”, the joint statement adds that the Russian affiliate has only “further intensified its war rhetoric” and moved to forcibly take over Ukrainian trade unions in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

In a separate appeal to the ITUC congress, KVPU, VOLYA and FPU, added further details in this regards: “The FNPR conducts actions in support of the Russian army and mobilisation within the framework of a ‘special military operation’, provides assistance to the Russian military who kill the Ukrainian population, and cooperates with trade union organisations of the occupied annexed territories.” Moreover, its representatives are involved in the illegal transportation of children from Ukraine to Russia. In addition, the FNPR held the World Day of Action for Decent Work under the slogan: ‘Everything for the front, everything for victory’. “The appeal continues: “[The] Russian Federation continues to destroy Ukraine and commit genocide against its population, using rocket strikes and bombs prohibited by the international law, carrying out terror in the occupied territories, creating concentration camps and deporting the population, including children, to Russia, destroying infrastructure and energy facilities, with the aim of leaving without water, electricity, heat for millions of Ukrainian residents during the cold season.

“Russia is committing the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. In addition, the Russian regime is provoking an economic, food, and energy crisis in the world with its war in Ukraine, undermining achievements in the direction of the global fight against climate changes and the promotion of democracy.” FNPR, as a trade union that supports the criminal actions and policies of the Russian authorities, both in terms of spreading information and carrying out actions, cannot remain a member of the ITUC.”

For these reasons, the Ukrainian and Polish ITUC affiliates are formally requested the FNPR’s expulsion.

The European Network of Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU) is backing the call to expel the FNPR and has asked its supporters to contact union organisations affiliated to the ITUC to explain the situation and gain support for the expulsion motion.

In a statement released on the eve of the congress, ENSU wrote: “No union organisation that acquiesces in and seeks to benefit from the invasion of another country can have a place in an organisation based on international working-class solidarity.

“The FNPR should be expelled and not be reconsidered for ITUC membership until it stops backing the Russian invasion and accepts Ukraine’s sovereignty within its 1991 borders.

“In the meantime, the ITUC should seek to establish ties with Russian worker organisations that respect Ukrainian sovereignty, and which struggle to survive under the growing repression that the regime of President Vladimir Putin is directing against all dissident opinion within Russia.”

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