

The pro-Putin demands of Britain's "Stop the War" campaign

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The pending anniversary of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine is a good occasion for working people around the world to signal full support to the inspiring Ukrainian resistance in defence of their sovereignty. This is not what is offered by the Stop the War Coalition demonstration scheduled for Saturday 25th February. Instead, it demands "that all sides engage in peace talks immediately. ... and call(s) for the British government to halt its continuing supply of armaments to Ukraine" (press release 16 Jan 2023).

If these demands were to be implemented it would signal complete victory for the war aims of the Putin police state. Clearly this demonstration cannot be supported by anyone that recognises the right of Ukraine to self-determination. The fact that one of its secondary slogans says "No to the Russian Invasion" doesn't alter its character. Its whole framework is off. It sees the war as a proxy between Russia and NATO. It considers that Putin had a legitimate right to respond to NATO's putative aggression (aka enrolling several East European and Baltic countries into NATO). Such an approach grants no agency to the Ukrainian people.

It is simply false to assert that Western imperialism caused this war through NATO expansionism. I leave aside the fact that the Cold War is over; the USSR has collapsed; and that Russia is a fully-fledged capitalist state. It is no different in kind from the other states that historically made up the Warsaw Pact, including those which are now part of NATO. US imperialism and its NATO allies remain a threat to workers and small farmer around the world and implacable opposition to NATO retains all its force. But it is necessary to be concrete.

The responsibility for the war lies squarely on the shoulders of Putin and the capitalist oligarch's for whom he speaks. Putin was and is absolutely clear: In his perception Ukraine has no right to exist. Ukraine, he avers, was always part of Russia except for the brief period when Lenin and the Bolsheviks recognised the right of Ukraine to establish its own state. He is determined to once again absorb Ukraine into a new Russian empire akin to that of the Czars. In effect, Putin embraces the notion that Russia has a "Manifest Destiny" to the region. Russia is not imperialist in the narrow Marxist sense, but it has imperial ambitions which it is attempting to force on Ukraine.

Ukraine, in which ordinary working people have been in the forefront, has fought back against Russia's assault. It is not because of superior armaments that Ukraine has been able to halt the Russian advance and begin a counter-offensive. It is because it has a cause worth fighting for, which has been taken up enthusiastically by ordinary working people, that it has scored these successes despite facing a better armed and much bigger Russian military. By the same token, it is because the Russian assault is not embraced by the majority of ordinary Russian people that Russia has done so badly. But of course Ukraine needs arms. We do not campaign for Western imperialism and, a fortiori, the British government to arm Ukraine. Our task is to solidarise with Ukraine against Russian aggression and to solidarise with the opponents of the war in Russia. But we acknowledge

the right of Ukraine to get weapons from whichever source it can. Class struggle fighters did not object when Irish Republicans sought arms from the Kaiser in order to take on the British occupiers of Ireland during the First World War. Nor did we object to the Vietnamese getting arms from the USSR and China in their fight against the genocidal US assault against Vietnam.

Stop the War highlights the fact that it is workers on both sides that are paying with their lives for the war, and that these casualties are rapidly increasing. But the fact or number of casualties cannot be made the arbiter of whether it is correct or not to fight. Casualties in the Vietnam war were qualitatively higher than in Ukraine. During the Vietnam war, class struggle militants fought and won against the Stalinist and liberal Peace Now forces that were active at that time in favour of a focus on US Troops Out Now. That latter course proved decisive in the end. Drawing on that tradition, today the focus must be on Russian Troops Out Now. If that were to happen, the war would be over and the killing would stop. That would not be the case if Peace Now was to become the order of the day. As the adage has it: "If Russia Stops Fighting There Will Be No More War; If Ukraine Stops Fighting, There Will Be No More Ukraine"

This is an international phenomenon. Cf:

<https://themilitant.com/2023/01/21/peace-movement-backs-putins-war-aims/>

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