

# Workers power

RUSSIAN TROOPS OUT!

NO TO NATO ESCALATION

OPEN BORDERS FOR ALL REFUGEES

SELF-DETERMINATION THROUGH

SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

● Russian troops out – No to Nato escalation

## FROM IMPERIALIST WAR TO CLASS WAR

**VLADIMIR PUTIN'S invasion of Ukraine is a savage and reactionary assault on the sovereignty and independence of the people of Ukraine.**

**People around the world are rightly moved by images of the wrecked apartment blocks and a rising death toll, covered on their TV screens. The UN estimates (27 February) 160,000 refugees, a large majority of them women and children, have been internally displaced and a further 116,000 have fled the country. This has led to an outpouring of public sympathy, from crowds in football stadiums to conversations in workplaces.**

Putin's denial of the existence of the Ukrainian nation, let alone their right to independence, is a return to the Great Russian chauvinism of the Tsars and Joseph Stalin. His invasion is not a defence of Russian speakers in Ukraine or liberation from a Nazi government but purely and simply a war of imperialist aggression, aiming to place Ukraine under Russian military and political control.

It is criminal disaster not only for the people of Ukraine but of Russia, too. Thousands of Russian citizens have, with great courage, taken to the streets to protest and have been brutalised and arrested by Putin's police.

But the support given to Ukraine by the Nato governments is far from a disinterested support for democracy. It marks a dramatic escalation of the conflict between Russian imperialism and its US and EU rivals in the Nato alliance. In short, they bear an equal responsibility for the tragedy unfolding. Neither side, whatever they claim, stands for peace, democracy, or the right of nations to self-determination.

In Britain, war hawk Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has endorsed the call for British volunteers to go to fight in Ukraine and the backbench Tories are clamouring for Nato to declare a No Fly Zone over Ukraine, which could lead straight to a catastrophic war between the two imperialist powers. The still slightly more restrained Boris

Johnson and Keir Starmer have limited themselves to calling for ever tougher sanctions and military aid. If Putin increases his atrocities, however, a Nato intervention re-

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**Putin's invasion is a war of imperialist aggression. But the Nato powers have exploited the conflict to dramatically escalate their conflict with Russia. Neither side, whatever they claim, stands for peace, democracy or the right of all Ukrainians to self-determination.**

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mains a possibility.

This should make workers and all progressive people stop and think. Why are the Tories, right wing Labour and the US president all whipping up the war? One thing is sure, it is not for the good of the Ukrainian people. Past experience of western imperialism alone demands socialists examine these questions.

War is the continuation of politics by other means, so what were the politics of the two sides which led to this?

### Background

The current conflict started in 2014 when

the UK, EU and US connived to turn popular protests against corruption and repression into a violent coup, spearheaded by neoliberal politicians and openly fascist militias which overthrew the unpopular, but elected, pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich. A government of rival oligarchs with an anti-Russian and ultra-nationalist ideology was installed by a parliament purged of opposition parties. The US intervened to stymie European Union attempts to broker a compromise, and keep figures closer to EU interests out of the new government.

The repressive policies of the new regime, particularly discrimination against Russian speaking districts, sparked a civil war in the East and provided Russia with the pretext it needed to annex Crimea and sponsor the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Moscow intended to use these as bargaining chips to ensure it could block Ukraine's membership of Nato.

In 2019, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, a native Russian speaker and Jewish, was elected President on a platform of opposing the neoliberal reforms mandated by IMF loans and the EU, as well as negotiating a peace deal with Russia over the future of the Donbas.

This project proved impossible for two reasons. The EU prevented his government reversing the wholesale privatisation or reinstating subsidies. These measures would turn the Ukrainian breadbasket into the property of European agribusiness.

Secondly, the hostility of the US, and presence of thousands of heavily armed fascists and ultra-nationalists integrated into the military units on the frontline in Donbas, prevented any Ukrainian government agreeing to grant the right to autonomy to any parts of Ukraine's multi-ethnic population.

Ukraine participated in the discussions with Russia, hosted by France and Germany,

which led to the 2015 Minsk II draft peace treaty – which would have guaranteed Ukraine's borders, while granting constitutional autonomy for Luhansk and Donetsk. Right-wing forces in Ukraine, backed by the US, swiftly vetoed the implementation of the accords.

The US not only vetoed the implementation of the accords, which it played no part in negotiating, but continued to talk up the prospect of Ukrainian Nato membership. This hugely raised the risk of conflict because membership of Nato would have continued the encirclement of Russia. It would mean that Nato forces could be stationed only a few hundred miles from St Petersburg and Moscow. Remember the US response, the threat of nuclear war, during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

While the geostrategic interests of an imperialist power in no way justify Putin's invasion, they do expose the West's claim to be defending Ukrainian democracy and independence as a cynical lie. Their real motive is to transform Ukraine into a semi-colony of European imperialism, on Nato's frontline.

In this context, taken from the standpoint of the world working class, and not the standpoint of the Great Russian chauvinists in the Kremlin or the democratic imperialists in London and Washington, the war in Ukraine is a product of the rivalry between two imperialist camps over which set of exploiters gets to rule in Ukraine. It is not yet, however, a war between the two imperialists.

So, how can the working class of Ukraine, as well as of Russia and the Nato states, defend themselves against not only the immediate aggressor, Putin, but also against the other side in this conflict? How can we prevent the prospect of the new cold war turning into a world war, potentially involving China? Already the crisis has begun to shift the pieces on the global chess board, with Germany agreeing to spend 100 billion euros on rearmament, Japan asking the US to station nuclear weapons on its territory and long-time neutral states like Sweden considering joining Nato. Meanwhile, the populations in the western democracies are being psyched up with the story that Putin is a new Hitler, just as he is telling Russians that Zelenskiy is a Nazi.

### **Working class**

Of course, Zelenskiy is no fascist. But he is a prisoner of Ukraine's contradictions: a semi-colonial nation, dominated by oligarchic clans oscillating between the magnets of Russian and European imperialism, sitting on the faultline of a struggle between the great powers seeking to redive the world between them.

That is why the Ukrainian working class should oppose his government and his war aims. A victory for Zelenskiy's policy of joining Nato would be a defeat for the Ukrainian working class, who would be the real victims. But the working class is international and, in times of imperialist war, we must act internationally.

In Russia, tens of thousands have demonstrated against Putin's war, leading

to thousands of arrests. In Britain, the EU and USA, we must attempt to do the same: against no-fly zones, against sending "volunteers" and ever more deadly military weapons and ultimately even troops for this war. At the same time, we should open the borders and offer full citizenship rights for Ukrainian refugees.

In Ukraine, socialists must fight for a bi-national state for Ukrainian and Russian speakers, based on equality of rights and self-determination for all. It can do this by forming workers' militia with the readily available guns to repel and demoralise the Russian troops, while agitating against Zelenskiy's government and for a socialist solution.

Politicians and the media in the West clamour about Ukrainian independence. But what does independence mean in the context of the new cold war?

Ukrainian 'independence' as a client state of EU imperialism under the Nato nuclear umbrella is self-deception. While Putin's war is a struggle to reclaim the predominant role of Russia's oligarchs in exploiting Ukrainian workers, and to deny Ukraine as a forward base for the Nato al-

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**Ukraine is a prisoner of its contradictions. It is a semi-colonial nation, dominated by oligarchic clans oscillating between Russian and European imperialism. Now it is at the sharp edge of a deepening inter-imperialist rivalry which threatens all-out war between the great powers.**

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liance; Zelenskiy's resistance is a war in defence of the dictatorship of Ukraine's oligarchs and their European sponsors, protected by the Nato nuclear umbrella.

Ukrainian workers can have no confidence in any of the imperialist powers who have plunged Ukraine into war through their reckless competition for military, economic and geostrategic advantage.

They have every right to oppose Russian forces attempting to occupy Ukrainian cities, annex territory, or install a client government – but without placing any confidence in the capitalist government of Zelenskiy. It can only win this war by abandoning Ukrainian sovereignty in favour of dependency on western imperialism and drafting Ukrainian workers as conscripts for Nato's war with Russia.

Ukrainian self-determination and a common homeland for all ethnicities can only be achieved on the basis of a common struggle by the workers of Ukraine, Russia and the western states to overthrow the imperialist order which precludes the free exercise of self-determination or genuine democratic control over society's wealth and resources.

Concretely, that means, in Russia, workers' action in so far as it is possible to disrupt the war machine of the Russian state: sabotage of war industries;

disruption of transport networks; agitation among the soldiers' families for troop withdrawal; and, within the army, for soldiers' committees to paralyse the officer caste and agitate against orders to attack their Ukrainian class brothers and sisters.

In Ukraine, the policy of proletarian independence from the oligarchs' government means fighting for the working class to lead the resistance to the Russian occupation by working class methods; accept the weapons distributed by the government but form workers' militias based on the factories and neighbourhoods for self-defence against the nationalist militias and against the imposition of Russian military control.

It means the struggle against reactionary anti-Russian, Ukrainian chauvinism, against the ruling class' struggle for 'territorial integrity', and for proletarian internationalism, the unity of Ukrainians of all ethnicities in the fight for a socialist republic comprising the voluntary union of all its peoples.

In the West, it means a resolute fight by socialists for class independence from the lying propaganda of 'our' governments. As the drumbeats for war sound louder, the western powers are enlisting democracy and self-determination into their war of words.

The Western powers are no friends of democracy. It is a luxury at home sustained by the exploitation of the rest of the world. So 'democracy' is demanded in Russia and Ukraine – but certainly not in Egypt or Saudi Arabia. Self-determination for Ukraine, but not for Russian speaking Ukrainians, and certainly not the Irish, the Catalans, or the Kashmiris. In Latin America, it is a transient commodity, often dispensed with when elected regimes challenge US interests.

All this is designed to soften up the people for war. We need to warn people by exposing the Western powers' hypocrisy and real aims: to enlarge Nato, re-arm Europe and prepare for future imperialist wars. Nato is not a defensive alliance; it is an instrument of US and West European imperialism, which dismembered Yugoslavia and destroyed Afghanistan.

We oppose any attempt to escalate the war by no-fly-zones or increasing Nato troops in the adjacent countries. We have no confidence in our rulers to defend democracy at home or anywhere else.

For that reason, we oppose all sanctions against Russia. Sanctions are a prelude to war; in their most aggressive form they are an act of economic war by our ruling class against the Russian people. They will deepen and prolong the conflict, not shorten it.

It is not Nato that will end this war, but action by workers, in the East and the West, to disrupt and sabotage the war machines of the imperialist powers, and for workers in Ukraine to take control of the war against Russia away from Zelenskiy and his Nato allies and into their own hands.

We need to redouble our efforts to build a fighting antiwar movement on the basis of the only genuine socialist policy: the main enemy is at home – for class war against imperialist war!