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As International Solidarity with Ukraine Grows, the Last Stand of Campism.

Thursday 13 October 2022, by [Tendence Coatsy](#) (Date first published: 8 October 2022).

A word that has come back into use recently is ‘campism’: “referring to the notion that the world is fundamentally divided into two camps, one imperialist and the other anti-imperialist.” Originally it referred to those who took the stand of the ‘Socialist’ states against the Western Imperialism. It was argued, by many New Left voices, that despite the bureaucracy and the repression of these regimes, that they were a counterweight, a stimulus to domestic welfare and security to buttress social support, and, a powerful force of support for the anti-colonial movements that continued to shake Western imperialist rule up till the 1970s. Evidence of much help, outside of Indochina and the far-East (a topic of enough complexity to need a book) from the Chinese Communist Party for anti-imperialism is scant, muddled by the conflict between Beijing and Moscow, and the former’s claims of “Soviet Social Imperialism.”

During the Cold War, Perry Anderson argued, reflecting a wider consensus, “Soviet foreign policy was essentially defensive: intransigent in its requirement of a security glacis in Eastern Europe to prevent any repetition of the invasion it had just suffered, no matter what degree of political or military repression was required to enforce this, but more than willing to ditch or hobble any revolution—in Greece or China—outside this zone that threatened to provoke trouble with a West plainly so much more powerful than itself.” ([IMPERIUM. 2013](#))

The end of the Soviet regime in the USSR and Eastern Europe, has seen what passed as a planned socialist economy replaced in the Russian Federation by what is often called “Crony Capitalism”. This, whatever one may think of the term, does not look an economic motor for the expansion of a state with imperialist ambitions. In 2015 Anderson described President Putin, “Cornered by economic crisis and Western boycott, the regime has now fallen back on Russian nationalism as its ideological mainstay” ([INCOMMENSURATE RUSSIA](#)) The Russian President, he opined, is condemned to run with “the hare of a military cameralism (*Translator’s note*: strong centralised state management) and hunting with the hounds of a financial capitalism”.

By invading Ukraine Putin has done more than tidy-up border conflicts with the Kremlin’s customary brutality. It looks as if it’s an attempt to recreate the earthworks defending the old USSR from the West. But there is a lot more involved. And it not just the obviously ‘campist’ remnants of the organised far-left, some of whom consider, say China, to be socialist, and even a few who still think something of the workers’ state lingers in Moscow, who have responded with the ‘phantom limb’ reactions that recall the older Cold War division of the world.

Some writers for New Left Review (NLR) its *Sidecar Blog*, fell back on the same older certainties, talking of “Yet the pitch of hysteria is as high as anything after 9/11 - the free world, civilisation, good and evil, all hang in the balance once again - there is less unanimity of opinion behind it. ” Addressing a limited audience [Alexander Levin](#) continued in March, “At a minimum, the US left

should summon what modest reserves of independence and strength it has to call on its own government to de-escalate, pursue direct and indirect talks, to trade guarantees of neutrality for a ceasefire and troop withdrawal. A refusal to contemplate any alteration to a post-Cold War order forged in hubris by the victors is not toughness. It is war mongering.”

A more measured approach by Tony Wood in April ([MATRIX OF WAR](#)), while laying the responsibility on Russia, still *ends*,

If the reigning political-economic order remains in place, it is difficult to see this ramping up of military expenditures not coming at the cost of what little remains of social safety nets. Neoliberal security states will trade growth for still more missiles and razor wire. It is hard not to see parallels here with the twilight of the Belle Epoque. Then as now, *inter-imperial tensions* fed a headlong arms race. Then as now, too, public opinion readily rallied behind national governments. In 1914 the parliamentary parties of the left followed suit, voting for war credits in their national legislatures and thus enabling the bloodbath they had pledged to avert two years earlier. This is, of course, another century, and the left is in a far weaker position, with far less influence on the course of events. By the same token, it is much more vulnerable to being swept along or swept aside by a militarized great-power confrontation it played no role in creating. Some of the old tools—internationalism, class solidarity, a fierce and uncompromising analytical clarity—will be needed to rearm the left against this new round of inter-imperial contention: against the powerful, against both their wars and their peace.

The German nationalist and sovereigntist Wolfgang Streeck wrote in July, [Means of Destruction](#),

Unspeakably awful as it is for the Ukrainian people, the current fighting in the Donbas is no more than a sideshow in a much larger story: that of an approaching shoot-out between a declining and a rising would-be global hegemon. One function served by the war in this context is the consolidation of the US hold over its European allies, who are required as backing for the American ‘pivot to Asia’ (Obama) – to what used to be the South China Sea and is now referred to by the loyal Western mediocracy as the Indo-Pacific.

Our old comrade Toni Negri, writing with Nicholas Guilhot, said in August ([New Reality?](#)), still focuses on the USA.

Europe must also keep a safe distance from a US grand strategy that has not yet found the political formula for accommodating the global decline of American power and its loss of prestige. Going back to the Cold War will not restore American supremacy but it will hurt Europe. It will not restore prestige either: leading a global fight for ‘democracy’ is less convincing when the leading country is one whose Senate is holding hearings about a coup attempt, where women’s rights are trampled by the jurisdictions supposed to protect them, and where the possibility of civil war is a recurrent conversation topic. Unsurprisingly, most of the world does not go along.

It would be a mistake for Europe to throw its lot in with this strategy. Rather, it should bet on the rising cadre of [‘restrainers’](#) in Washington who advocate a different and less bellicose foreign policy, far from the unctuous homilies about the liberal international order and its military underpinnings.

All of which leads back to *Susan Watkins’* New Left Review editorial line: an [“avoidable war”](#), “In

Ukraine, Obama's erstwhile (Note: that is, not the present day one, by a long shot) Director of the CIA has candidly explained, the US is fighting a proxy war with Russia." "Russia now appears to be trying to regroup and dig in, besieging, one by one, the grimy Ukrainian-held cities of the Donbas. In doing so, *it continues to play into Washington's hands.*"

But the war is there.

It is terrifying. In one piece on the NLR site that focuses on the actor who caused the invasion the American New Leftist, Mike Davis, suggests, "By all accounts, Putin, who surrounds himself with as much astrology, mysticism and perversion as the terminal Romanovs, sincerely believes that he must save the Ukrainians from being Ukrainians lest the celestial destiny of the Rus becomes impossible. The present must be smashed in order to make an imaginary past the future." ([Thanatos Triumphant](#), March 2022). The real issue is that has been created by a state animated by his "aggressive synthesis of Stalinist Communism and Great Russian Tsarism", "driven by a mission, to defend a conservative and identitarian world-vision, an alternative to Western decadence", as Edwy Plenel eloquently states in *L'Épreuve et la Contre-épreuve. De la Yougoslavie à l'Ukraine*.

It is not our job to stand aside. There is little of the alleged war-mongering in the air, and certainly not a hint of "rallying behind national governments" by most of the population, left alone the left. 'Analytical clarity' demands we stand with the oppressed, not to dredge from the depths the wreckage of campist arguments. The use of invective, or, disguised innuendo about the West, shown in these statements published by the New Left Review, is not just irrelevant faced with the urgent need to back the victims, enveloping the issues in fog. It is a kind of attentisme, a call to a waiting game, that is aimed at those who wish to show solidarity. Or at worse, a voice from those who wish no solidarity at all.

Going from the open old style campism of Galloway's gang, the seething resentment those whose narrative about neo-liberal globalism and the horrors of the European Union cuts no ice at present, to the fumbling academic effort to come to terms with the reality of Russian nationalism, a variant of national populism with roots too complex to sum up in a few phrases. By their effect, if not their aim, is simple. They boil down to one point: the US and its arm NATO are still there at the root of the problem.

We say, with Plenel, "Internationalism stands on the side of the dominated against their oppressors, whoever they may be, across frontiers." It is not a demand to back the internal policies of the Ukrainian government, beginning with their labour laws. It is not - the very idea! - to back our rulers. It is to stand with the Ukrainian people whose courageous resistance is an inspiration across the world.

Thanks to leftist organizations around the world who are in solidarity with Ukraine and have done a lot to support us. This article is dedicated to you ☐ [@partiarazem](#), [@EuropeanWith](#), [@UkraineSol](#), [@ILabourNSS](#). <https://t.co/FZL0Bb3B38>

— Spilne | Commons (@commonscomua) [October 4, 2022](#)

There are some remnants of political campism left with wider influence than the academic or political fringes:

If you squint your eyes you might even see some similarities with the Aryan Nation and Azov Battalion iconography.

Some local history via [@ruralorganize](https://t.co/snqZTMJEhG) <https://t.co/snqZTMJEhG>
[pic.twitter.com/mQ8LAm3d6s](https://t.co/snqZTMJEhG)

— Jackson County DSA (@JacksonCtyDsa) [October 6, 2022](#)

This chap here, claiming to be 'even-handed', offers another angle on the same theme:

UK media claim gold teeth show Russian war crime. Germans show dentist: 'They're mine' <https://t.co/0xb7sMatZ1>

— The SKWAWKBOX (@skwawkbox) [October 7, 2022](#)

[Skwawkbox](#):

GrayZone journalists appeared on the now-infamous chart compiled by supposedly left journalist Paul Mason as part of his apparent cooperation with UK security services in shutting down inconvenient news sources and were particularly targeted by Mason and his intelligence services correspondent in emails leaked to Gray Zone by hackers. Mason has [claimed that the emails 'may be' fake](#).

In this country, the Establishment media's attempts to misinform UK citizens has even seen the [BBC u-turn on its own reporting of the rise of nazism in Ukraine to then tell viewers that reports of nazis in Ukraine were exaggerated](#) and even mere Russian propaganda. Acts by Ukrainian president Zelenskiy to [shut down journalism and workers' rights](#) in Ukraine have been almost [entirely ignored by the UK media - and the supposed 'opposition' leadership](#), which is as [committed to war in Ukraine and suspends members who dare point out inconvenient facts](#).

Some say that Skwawkbox, Steve Walker, fancies himself as a modern Tintin, a courageous reporter. Others suggest he went Explorers on the Moon (*On a marché sur la Lune*) and has yet to come back.

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