

# Labour Must Help Ukraine Win The War

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**We will soon be approaching one year since Russia launched the genocidal all-out invasion of Ukraine on 24 February. This new year provides us with an vantage point to consider what has happened and our approach in the period ahead. It is one in which Labour must do all in its power to help Ukraine to win both on the military and the social front of the war.**

In the last year we have witnessed Ukrainians mount a courageous resistance against a nuclear superpower with greater numbers, weapons and resources. Against the odds, and Washington's advice to evacuate the government, the populace rallied to bolster a resistance which successfully defended their capital Kyiv and second city Kharkiv. Strengthened by thousands of volunteers and making the most of the aid provided, the armed forces liberated the Kharkiv region and Kherson. They have provided for history yet another example that a people empowered by the idea of freedom can defeat the strongest armies of the world.

Overall, 1,888 settlements have been liberated, but this is not yet victory, Russia still occupies almost as many villages and towns. Ukrainian's know the price of occupation, the thriving city of Mariupol destroyed with 25,000 killed, areas liberated only revealing mass graves and horrific war crimes by Russian forces. Conscious of this reality Ukrainians are determined to free their entire country and continue their struggle.

Yet despite defeating Russian strategic objectives at each turn and with barrages of missiles targeting the energy grid to maximise civilian suffering, the idea of Ukraine winning has been brought into question by a wide spectrum of opinion, from U.S military and political officials to the siren calls of sectarian socialism, stating it is time for negotiations and even trading land for peace.

That our solidarity must comprise advocating the victory of Ukraine follows from the appreciation of two components of the current war.

**The first is that Ukraine is an historically oppressed nation** whose struggle is as legitimate as those colonies who struggled against from Empires in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Subjugated by the Russian Tsarism for more than two and a half centuries, Ukraine was the object of economic exploitation, national oppression, and a colony for Russifying policies by the ruling classes of the Russian Empire. But for brief periods this continued in new forms in the USSR, with millions of Ukrainians losing their lives at the hands of the Kremlin and rival powers.

That this history is not fully appreciated in the labour movement can be partly explained not only by Stalinism but notably a relentless campaign of Kremlin disinformation, particularly since Euromaidan in 2014. Ideas which first arose in the Tsarist era and adhered to by Russia's rulers have filtered into sections of our movement, aided by such vehicles as Russia Today and the *Morning Star*.

Essentially that Ukraine is historically part of a unitary Russia and the idea of a separate Ukrainian nation is manufactured by foreign powers to weaken Russia. This has been accompanied by old

Stalinist falsehoods portraying the entire history of the Ukrainian movement for greater freedom as that of reactionaries.

That Putin has harnessed support of the far-right is understandable, what is appalling is sections of the left aligned itself with a Russian elite make no pretence of 'socialist' camouflage in acting as heir of the Tsars.

To strengthen solidarity there needs to be a campaign to raise awareness of the true history of Ukraine. But not to justify support for the resistance on the basis of past crimes but that the current invasion is a continuation of that oppression, to reimpose neo-colonial domination.

The majority of our movement support Ukraine and challenging the efforts of the sectarians and parts of the union hierarchy is important, for they are seeking to exploit the cost-of-living crisis to erode popular support for Ukraine. This support is one of the reasons for western democracies aid to Ukraine. Sustaining this popular support should be of concern to Labour and points to the second reason to help Ukraine win.

**Russia's war on Ukraine is an expression of a broader attack on democracy that is occurring throughout the world.**

We see the growth of authoritarian tendencies which if not resisted can accelerate in the context of climate change and new capitalist crisis. Analysis of the present situation must take into consideration the fact we are already living in a new historical period. We see a spiral of inter-state competition, state racism, degrading of international institutions, creeping authoritarianism. These features of this ever-dehumanizing society are amongst the character traits of this new phase, China's dictator Xi Jinping summed up when he said 'democracies cannot be sustained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, autocracies will run the world.'

If Putin wins it will strengthen reactionary forces globally, analogous to the fall of the Spanish Republic. But the success of the authoritarians is no more inevitable today than in the 1930s. The war in Ukraine is a frontline of the fight against the new authoritarians just as it stopping Russia reasserting its role as "gendarme of European reaction" to preventing social and democratic progress in the region.

**How then can Labour help Ukraine win?**

Labour needs to break from a non-partisan approach, Bevan's criticism of Tory hypocrisy in 1943 is as relevant to their attitude to Putin - 'There are many Members in the House who have no complaint against Fascism, except when it is strong enough to threaten them'. They need to be subjected to far more scrutiny over aid to Ukraine and reconstruction polices. The fact that since January the MOD sold off 1,105 vehicles, including combat vehicles and ambulances rather than dispatch to Ukraine is shameful.

Information *Ukraine Solidarity Campaign* obtained through Parliamentary disclosure confirms that arising from defence reviews significant new aid could be provided to Ukraine in 2023 - **including Typhoon Aircraft and Chinook Helicopters, and fleets of Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle, Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles and crucially Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks**. This could make a major contribution to helping end the war sooner. Labour must campaign for these arms to Ukraine!

But Labour must aid on the social front, conference policy commits to support for a socially progressive reconstruction involving the trade unions. Instead the Tories are directly aiding the

introduction of anti-union laws alongside a reconstruction prizing open Ukraine for profit making by global capital, with deregulation of labour rights. Russian imperialism must pay for their war crimes through a new Nuremberg, and for reconstruction through seizure of assets. In this we must campaign alongside the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine and the democratic left in Ukraine.

**These must be amongst our key priorities in 2023 to win the war and ensure a genuine just peace for Ukraine.**

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**P.S.**

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