

# Canada: Ukraine: Ceasefire... or capitulation?

Friday 1 March 2024, by [FIDLER Richard](#), [POPINOT Camille](#) (Date first published: 29 February 2024).

**Last August, I published a critique of left responses in [Canadian Left Responses to War in Ukraine - a Provisional Balance Sheet](#). I noted that progressive opinion in support of Ukraine's defense of its territorial sovereignty and national self-determination tended to be stronger in Quebec than in English Canada. However, a notable exception was a broad pacifist collective, [Échec à la Guerre](#). It "claims to oppose all imperialisms," I wrote, "but has not rallied to defend Ukraine."**

Since then, Échec à la Guerre has, if anything, stepped up its campaign against solidarity with Ukraine. Articles by its leading spokespersons have been published in daily newspapers and often replicated on social media, including on-line solidarity websites. A recent "open letter" it published, to mark the second anniversary of Russia's invasion, was also published on websites that have sought to rally support for Ukraine, among them the international solidarity site [Alternatives](#), and the site [Presse-toi à gauche](#) (PTàG), which is sympathetic to Québec solidaire.

However, PTàG also published in the same issue a [critical and much-needed response](#) to the article, by Camille Popinot, addressed to many key issues that have been raised among the Western left as a result of the war. Notable is its appeal to the left-wing affiliates of Échec à la Guerre to disavow its position. Here is my translation of the article. - Richard Fidler.

## Ceasefire or capitulation -

### Views of the Ukrainian and Russian lefts

By Camille Popinot

The Quebec "center-left and pro-independence" newspaper Le Devoir has just published an [open letter signed by five pacifists](#), who call for a "ceasefire and immediate negotiations" in Ukraine.

The letter itself would not be worth our attention had the authors not said they were signing "on behalf of" the Échec à la Guerre Collective.

In fact, the Collective brings together left-wing political parties (Québec Solidaire, Communist Party), numerous unions (CSN, FTQ, nurses, teachers, etc.), community groups and civil-rights defenders (FRAPRU, League of Rights and Freedoms, AQOCI, MEPACQ etc.) and religious organizations. [1] In short, it includes a good number of activists in Quebec who define themselves as left-wing, trade unionists, socialists, feminists, anti-capitalists, anti-imperialists, post-colonialists, alter-globalists and even internationalists - and who see themselves associated, at least indirectly, with the content of this pacifist appeal.

### Ceasefire or capitulation?

The letter in question is a poor caricature of the propaganda conveyed by Vladimir Putin: the war

was provoked by the United States, the West, NATO, which “are conducting a real proxy war in Ukraine.” Russia, for its part, did everything it could to negotiate and avoid conflict but it had to defend its “great power” interests. And finally — as “the war in Ukraine did not go according to the West’s plans,” as the economic sanctions have failed, as the “situation is developing to Russia’s advantage,” — we must avoid its spiraling into a nuclear war. It is in the interest of the Ukrainians and of humanity to impose a “ceasefire” as quickly as possible. Of course the text does not tell us how, or what the implications might be, but it must be done and be “mutually acceptable” to the security interests of Ukraine and Russia. And there you have it, you just had to think about it and write it down.

Beyond a narrative worthy of George Orwell’s Newspeak — where those who were thought to be the attacked become the aggressors, the victims the culprits, the victories the defeats, the imperialists the colonized etc. — the primary goal of the letter is to end Canadian military support for Ukraine. It is indeed certain that if Ukraine no longer receives any support, then it will have no choice but to negotiate a ceasefire. And the sooner we stop supporting it, the sooner the ceasefire desired by the authors of the letter will be imposed. But will it be “mutually acceptable?”

And in fact, the only problem with the execution of this master plan is that the Ukrainians - and fortunately many other people - now think it is no longer a question of a ceasefire but of an all-out capitulation. And, regardless, notwithstanding the incantations of Quebec pacifists, the Ukrainians refuse to capitulate.

### **Should we listen to the Ukrainians or ignore them and defend the pacifism of *Échec à la Guerre*?**

But the authors of the letter couldn’t care less about what Ukrainians think and want. It is indeed astonishing to see with what ease, shamefully, five pacifists (who certainly claim to be post-colonialists), well sheltered from the bombs, can claim to express themselves for and in the interest of the Ukrainians, without even taking the trouble to cite just one.

As if the Ukrainians could not speak, as if their demands were unknown, as if their opinion was in any case irrelevant in view of the global concerns of the five Quebec pacifists. Ukrainians are de facto infantilized, treated like children who have reacted impulsively, who must be calmed down and to whom it is necessary to explain, and if needed impose, what is good for them.

It’s true that they don’t listen much, not even to the learned advice of our five pacifists or Western and Russian capitalists. Instead of fleeing by taxi and calmly allowing themselves to be colonized, as Vladimir Putin but also all NATO members expected, they chose to resist and continue to resist despite everything, seeming to forget that confronting them is a nuclear power.

In short, if for the authors of the letter the opinion of the Ukrainians does not count, the Ukrainians on the other hand would do well to listen to them. This is an already well-documented concept and practice of “international solidarity.”

### **But why does the Ukrainian left refuse to capitulate?**

But let’s imagine that, unlike the five pacifist missionaries, the associative members of the Collective consider it important to listen and take into account what the Ukrainians are demanding, like any internationalist worthy of the name. They can then easily obtain information in French thanks to the valuable work carried out by a group of [several left-wing publishing houses](#) (including Quebec ones) and the work of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine ([ENSU/RESU](#)).

Left-wing political parties, unions and Quebec community groups can then see in these thousands of documents that in many aspects, Ukrainian society is not very different from Quebec society; and that, like Quebec, it is a deeply divided society. There are fascists, racists, war profiteering capitalists, villainous and concealed multimillionaires, corrupt politicians, homophobic religious people, antisemites, Islamophobes, etc. And, as in Quebec, in the absence of a truly internationalist left, it is this trend that is on the rise.

But there are also many left-wing activists, anti-capitalists, feminists and anarchists who, in all conscience, have chosen to defend the right to independence, not only with weapons in their hands but also under the command of a bourgeois and patriarchal government, the only militarily viable solution according to them to avoid being colonized and disappearing. There are trade unionists who campaign against the scandalous reform of the Labor Code while providing continued support to the soldiers in the trenches. There are internationalist activists who, despite the state of emergency, take the time to send messages of solidarity to the Palestinians, to the French or British strikers. There are anti-capitalists who campaign against the neo-liberal reforms of Zelensky, the IMF and the World Bank, for the nationalization of the arms industry, the expropriation of the oligarchs. And there are activists who, at the risk of their lives, document the reality in the occupied territories, the theft of children, the pillaging of Mariupol and its region, rapid Russification, etc.

Still, in these precious documents, the members of the Collective will also be able to see that Ukrainians are also fighting for peace, a ceasefire and disarmament. The difference, however, is that they do not accept the conditions proposed by our five pacifists or Vladimir Putin. They keep repeating it: if Russia withdraws, there will be no more war. On the other hand, if Ukraine gives in, there is no more Ukraine.

### **Who will disarm and who will be disarmed?**

In fact, when we confronted by the army of a leader who repeats to anyone who will listen that you do not exist and who has already shown the Chechens, the Syrians or the Georgians very clearly the conditions of lasting peace and disarmament according to him, we surely recall more clearly certain lessons from history: “the whole question is to know who will disarm and who will be disarmed.”

Consequently, today, what the members of the Collective will not find in these multiple documents from trade unionists, socialists, feminists, anti-capitalists, Ukrainian internationalists are calls to put an end to military support for the Ukrainian army, to oppose Ukraine’s entry into NATO or the European Union. These activists of the Ukrainian left say over and over: it is not with a light heart that they make these political choices; it’s a question of priorities, of survival.

### **What if the Russian left also wanted Putin’s military defeat?**

Our five pacifists could also, still with a perspective of international solidarity, turn to Russian internationalist activists. It is true that it is much more difficult to get in touch with them but, thanks to the work of ENSU activists, we have in particular the declarations of the Russian Socialist Movement. And here is an extract from a [recent press release](#), in the hope that the members of the Échec à la Guerre Collective will be encouraged to read it in its entirety:

Putin’s regime can no longer exit the state of war, as the only way to maintain its system is to escalate the international situation and intensify political repression within Russia.

That is why any negotiations with Putin now would bring, at best, a brief respite, not a genuine peace.

A victory for Russia would be evidence of the West's weakness and openness to redrawing its spheres of influence, above all in the post-Soviet space. Moldova and the Baltic States could be the next victims of aggression. A defeat for the regime, on the other hand, would be tantamount to its collapse.

Only the Ukrainian people have the right to decide when and under what conditions to make peace. As long as Ukrainians show a will to resist and the Putin regime remains unchanged in its expansionist goals, any coercion of Ukraine into negotiations is a step towards an imperialist "deal" at the expense of Ukrainian independence.

That imperialist "peace deal" would mean a return to the practice of the "great powers" partitioning the rest of the world, that is, to the conditions that gave birth to the First and Second World Wars.

The main obstacle to peace is certainly not Zelensky's "unwillingness to compromise," nor is it Biden's or Scholz's "hawkishness": it is Putin's unwillingness to even discuss deoccupying the Ukrainian territories seized after February 24, 2022. And it is the aggressor, not the victim, who must be forced to negotiate.

It is obvious that this position, like that of the Ukrainian left summarized here, reflects only part and probably only a very small part of the opinions of the Russian or Ukrainian left. But these are the positions that we relay, that we have chosen to support, by citing our sources. Let the five Quebec pacifists do the same and tell us in whose name they speak and call for an "immediate ceasefire" in Ukraine.

While waiting for their sources, we share the opinion of the Russian Socialist Movement that, in the current context, what ultimately counts is the choice of the Ukrainian people and that "it is the aggressor, not the victim, who must be forced to negotiate." The complete opposite of what the five Quebec pacifists have chosen to defend "on behalf of" a significant collective of Quebec workers.

We then hope that the associative members of the *Échec à la Guerre* Collective will make it known that they firmly condemn this despicable position which goes against the right to self-determination and all the basic principles of international working-class and feminist solidarity, of internationalism.

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**P.S.**

Life on the Left

<https://lifeonleft.blogspot.com/2024/02/ukraine-ceasefire-or-capitulation.html>

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**Footnotes**

[1] The members of the collective are listed here: <https://echecalaguerre.org/le->

[collectif/membres/](#). - RF