

Open Letter to our DSA comrades:

USA: Ukraine and Consistent Anti-Imperialism

Thursday 3 August 2023, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 3 August 2023).

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is about to make the terrible mistake of breaking with over 100 years of solidarity with colonial peoples in their struggles against imperialism and with solidarity with the oppressed in their fight for democracy.

Since 2014, Russia has waged a war of aggression against its former colony of Ukraine, seizing Crimea in 2014, organizing separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk, and then since February 24, 2022 launching a full-scale war. This is an openly annexationist invasion with a genocidal trajectory, which the Ukrainian people are resisting for the survival of their nation. The Russian war has involved atrocities such as the massacre of civilian populations and the kidnapping of thousands of children.

For over 100 years revolutionary, democratic socialists have supported the right of nations to self-determination, placing ourselves on the side of the people of Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba and many African nations as they fought anti-colonial wars. Revolutionary, democratic socialists have always supported their right to get arms from wherever they could to fight for their national sovereignty against imperial powers. This is not the first time that the objectives of imperial powers and socialists have coincided. During World War II, many people in France, Italy, and Poland, including many on the left, rose up to fight against the Nazis. They sought and (to some extent) received arms and materials from the Allies. The US sent arms to Tito and the Yugoslav partisans fighting the German occupation, and to the Viet Minh in their fight for national liberation against Japan; and we think that's a good thing. We took the same position on the right of Hungarians in 1956, Czechs and Slovaks in 1968, and Poles in 1980 to establish their own governments free from the domination, and in two of those cases, the military intervention of the Soviet Union. Revolutionary, democratic socialists support for the right to self-determination was offered independently of the political character of the former colonial states.

Now, DSA appears to be prepared in the case of Ukraine to break with this long history of support for oppressed people. The failure to support Ukraine implies permitting Russia to win its imperialist war, to conquer Ukraine in part or in whole, and to impose on the conquered territory Vladimir Putin's brutal authoritarian rule that denies democratic rights to its citizens, its workers, LGBTQ people, and ethnic minorities. Putin also wants to suppress Ukrainian language and culture, which is why his army has looted museums and stolen children.

While Ukraine has been receiving military weapons from the United States and NATO countries, no one has forced the Ukrainians to fight this war, nor could they. The Ukrainians fight for their country of their own free will, and at the direction of their elected leadership. This is not a proxy-war between great powers, but rather a war of national self-determination by an imperfect and neoliberal democracy against an imperialist state. Our socialist principles in support of national self-

determination and democracy everywhere should place us on the side of Ukraine.

It's a basic principle of anti-imperialist politics that "our main enemy is at home," meaning in our case US imperialism and its allies, with all the monstrous crimes against humanity perpetrated by U.S. policies, in our name. However, that has never meant seeing "the other side," e.g. today's powers of China or Russia as the United States' main imperial rivals, as "progressive" in any sense or viewing their crimes as a lesser evil or simply a response to U.S. "provocation." Consequently, we should oppose the Consensus Resolution #4: International Committee Consensus Resolution as well as the Socialist Anti-Militarism and the War in Ukraine (Amendment to CR #4 (IC)] amendment both of which violate these principles.

Another amendment to the International Committee's resolution, the Consensus Resolution Amendment C: For a Class-Struggle Internationalism (Amendment to CR #4 (IC)), while recognizing the importance of democratic rights and self-determination of nations in the abstract, avoids the burning question of which side socialists should be on when it comes to Ukraine.

As consistent rather than selective anti-imperialists, we fully understand that U.S./NATO military aid to Ukraine is based on the interests of the western powers, not on supporting "democracy against authoritarianism" or other pretenses. The crimes of U.S. imperialism, the dominant global power - in Latin America, in full support of Israel's war on the Palestinian people and complicity with the most brutal Middle Eastern dictatorships like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and so much more - continue unabated. None of this negates Ukraine's right to receive military aid from anywhere it can. No one in DSA supports the United States government's foreign policy or its political and economic objectives in Europe or anywhere else in the world. As socialists, we oppose NATO and call for its dissolution. But it happens that at this moment, in the short run, the policy of the U.S. and NATO, for their own reasons, coincides with that of international socialists on the question of arming Ukraine.

While national self-determination is at the center of this discussion, the question of support for democratic movements is also involved. In the past, DSA's International Committee has muted criticism of some authoritarian regimes, and failed to consistently support democratic movements. We need to have a discussion about the situation today where we don't have revolutionary regimes, but do have more or less authoritarian and more or less democratic ones, and we need to develop some sophistication about how we develop our analysis.

Ukraine was at the outbreak of the war a very imperfect democracy, but unlike Russia it had some independent labor unions and leftist groups and publications that opposed the Zelensky government. DSA has so far failed to support the Ukrainian people in general, it has declined to support the democratic groups, socialists and left anarchists, unions, and feminists within Ukraine. In our opinion DSA should be building support for Ukraine's legitimate war against Russia's invasion; in demanding both the immediate withdrawal of Russian occupation forces and the cancellation of Ukraine's crippling and unpayable foreign debt; and supporting and magnifying the voices of progressive and left Ukrainian forces in resisting their own government's anti-labor and neoliberal policies while actively participating in the war effort.

The socialist tradition demands that we stand with Ukraine and with movements for democracy by the oppressed and the exploited everywhere.

In solidarity:

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