

# European Left leaders on Ukraine: Not even a hint of solidarity

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**The site of the think tank Transform! published an article, “The Left and the inter-imperial war”, by Michael Brie and Heinz Bierbaum on August 13. The authors are long-standing and widely respected leading figures in Die Linke (The Left, Germany). Heinz Bierbaum was President of the European Left Party from 2019 to 2022 and is now President of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.**

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Die Linke is today in a crisis that is widely described as existential. Many comrades are trying to help the party emerge from the fog in which it seems to have lost itself and develop an approach that is class-based and class-oriented. Brie and Bierbaum are two of them. Some time ago they co-wrote an article in *Neues Deutschland* along those lines. There were only passing references to the war in Ukraine, but they were disquieting. In the light of their present contribution, the disquieting references were clearly premonitory to something much more serious. (A recent contribution by Walter Baer, President of the European Left Party, “[Making the difference](#)”, which deals with broader questions, is on the question of Ukraine, close to the position of Brie and Bierbaum, albeit in a more moderate tone).

The authors quote from Ferdinand Lassalle: “All great political action begins with the enunciation of what is. All political small-mindedness consists in concealing and glossing over what is.” One can only agree. So, let us ask ourselves, what is, in Ukraine, today? And the first point to make is that the most important thing that is happening does not get a mention in their document.

We could say that the most important thing is that Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. That is of course true, and it is what started the present war. But actually, the really important thing is that the invasion was met by the massive resistance of the Ukrainian people. Not just the government and the armed forces, but the people. Partisans in the occupied territories, organisations and movements of civil society and grassroots initiatives everywhere, supporting the defence of their country. The Roma community, frequently the object of discrimination in Ukraine as elsewhere, has also mobilised. The forms of resistance can be many, both armed and unarmed. There are two major trade union confederations in Ukraine. They both support the defence of their country. They raise money to help their members who are in the armed forces and to buy military equipment. The political left supports the war, as does a very active women’s network. Even the anarchists have

suspended their opposition to all states to join the army and fight.

At the same time, the unions and the left fight against the neoliberal policies of the Ukrainian government, particularly the anti-union laws and in defence of public services. The international supporters of Ukraine support the Ukrainian unions on both levels, against Russian aggression and in defence of their social rights. On the whole, European unions have a better record than the political left. They provide real aid to the Ukrainian unions in many ways and some of them express very clearly their political support for Ukraine. This is in part at least because many of them have known and aided the Ukrainian unions for 20 or 30 years. For the same reason they do what they can to support the Belarusian unions who have been severely repressed by Lukashenko.

It should also be taken into account that the trade unions, weakened though they have been, are still mass organisations and therefore more responsive to [the pro-Ukrainian public opinion, which is in a majority in every country in Western Europe](#), even in those where the left that views world politics through the lens of conflicting camps (the “campist” left) and that which supports appeasing Putin makes the most noise. The most recent victory for solidarity with Ukraine was the overwhelming vote at the congress of the British trade unions (See Appendix 1).

## **A. Nature of the war**

As far as the international political left is concerned, there is no “on the whole”. There are parties that support Ukraine and parties that do not, whether for pacifist, campist or geopolitical reasons. And in many countries, there are divisions on the left.

The authors quote Rosa Luxemburg to affirm that there is no such thing as a defensive war. Later, however, they explain “on the part of Russia, it is about defending its threatened geopolitical position”. Not its territory, not its people, but its “threatened geopolitical position.” We will come back to that. In any case the present war is a defensive war that began by Ukraine defending itself from Russian aggression. We will look later at where that aggression came from. To take another example, in 1979 Vietnam fought a successful defensive war against a Chinese invasion. So, defensive wars exist, but whether a war is defensive or offensive is not the central question. What matters is the nature of the war and of the countries involved, not who starts it. For example, there is no doubt that both the Algerian and Irish wars of independence were launched by organisations of the colonised peoples who fired the first shots. There is also no doubt that the ensuing wars were wars of national liberation, in response to centuries of colonial oppression by French and British imperialism.

To come back to the present war. It is a war of aggression launched by Russian imperialism against Ukraine, which had been oppressed by Russia for centuries. The relation between Ukraine and Russia was likened by Vladimir Lenin to that between Britain and Ireland, in very stark terms: “exploited to the limit, without receiving anything in return”. (Speech in Zurich, 27 October 1914, not included in *Collected Works*. This was also the only recorded occasion on which Lenin explicitly called for the independence of Ukraine.) So, Ukraine has every right to defend itself and it is the duty of the internationalist left to support it. That would still be the case if Ukraine had gone on the offensive in the Donbas or Crimea between 2014 and 2022.

### **1. What do Ukrainians want?**

What do our authors have to say about the resistance of Ukrainian people? Practically nothing. To say that they gloss it over would be an understatement. They speak of “a slaughterhouse for the soldiers from both sides” — from both sides, as if they were on the same level. They are not. At the

Battle of Stalingrad in 1942-43, hundreds of thousands of soldiers died. On both sides. But those sides were not equal and at that time no one thought they were. The soldiers of the Red Army died defending their country and later going on the offensive. Those of the Wehrmacht died invading the Soviet Union and defending Nazi Germany. There was no equal sign. In Vietnam, 60,000 US soldiers died. Many of them had already understood that they were fighting an unjust war and just wanted to go home. But war is implacable. When your country is occupied by an imperialist army you can not drive them out without killing a lot of their soldiers. And the US army killed many, many more Vietnamese.

The authors characterise the war as an inter-imperial war. Nothing new there, except saying imperial rather than imperialist. It repeats the usual litany of how NATO broke its promises not to enlarge to the East and how Russia felt threatened and had to defend itself. I will not deal with that in any detail, since I have already done so elsewhere ([Russia's war on Ukraine and the European lefts](#)). But let us underline what is essential in the document. "Once we understand that this war is first and foremost an inter-imperial war, the steps towards peace also become crystal clear from a left perspective." What is actually crystal clear is that the definition of inter-imperial or proxy war makes it possible to treat the people of Ukraine as a negligible quantity and sell them down the river.

The first striking aspect of the article is its complete negation of Ukrainians as agents of their own future. Because they are not just victims, nor are they simply manipulated by the wicked Western imperialists. Ukrainian people know what they want and they are ready to fight for it. But what do we read? First of all, "The attempts of the US and the EU to make Ukraine choose a one-sided orientation towards the EU and NATO, and thus (abandon) the policy of an in-between role between West and East." First, Ukrainians never chose this in-between role, it was imposed on them. Second, they did choose to turn away from Russia and towards Europe. They chose that at Maidan, and they confirmed that choice at elections in 2014 and 2019. Before 2014 there was a broadly positive attitude to the EU but not a clear majority. There was never a majority for NATO before 2014. After that there was a majority for both the EU and NATO. And the majority got bigger and became massive after February 24, 2022. The reason can be summed up in two words: Putin, Russia.

On August 29 [a poll was published, conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology](#) on behalf of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. It showed (page 39) that 83.5 per cent of Ukrainians think victory is only possible if all the occupied territories are returned. Only 4 per cent thought that going back to the status quo ante February 24, 2022, was acceptable, that is, letting Russia keep Crimea and the "republics". There is nothing surprising about these figures, they merely serve to confirm those of previous polls. Some recent demonstrations illustrate the attitude towards the war. In Odesa, Lviv and elsewhere there have been demonstrations demanding that money destined by city councils for various purposes should instead be used to support the war effort. In Kyiv demonstrations against corruption in the municipal administration have had the same objective. These are not demonstrations against the war or in protest against Ukraine being used as a "proxy" by Western imperialism. They are demands for the war to be conducted with the maximum of resources available.

## **2. The future proposed for Ukraine: 'frozen conflict'**

What the document has to say about the future of Ukraine has nothing to do with what the Ukrainian people want.

"An immediate ceasefire without any preconditions ... controlled by the UN and neutral states. In the second step, negotiations must be conducted to seek a balance of interest between all belligerent states and those involved in the war." Not a mention of the rights of the Ukrainian people.

Just to make things absolutely clear we can read, **“The idea that this can lead to a pre-war state of affairs is unrealistic.”** (Emphasis in original) In the context of the document, this statement is actually exact. The “this” which is referred to concerns the plan outlined above. A classic argument in favour of negotiations over the heads of those most concerned, in this case the Ukrainian people. From the Congress of Vienna in 1815 onwards such “peace treaties” have only prepared the ground for new wars — and sometimes revolutions. Indeed such a process in Ukraine cannot lead to a “pre-war state of affairs”, which would necessarily involve the withdrawal of Russian troops. The ongoing struggle of the Ukrainian people can lead to such a state of affairs. But neither this struggle nor the demand for the withdrawal of Russian troops get as much as a mention from the authors.

They write, “a good deal of effort is needed to create a comprehensive system of common security which includes Russia. This will take a considerable amount of time.” This is beyond an understatement, and it is an utterly unrealistic objective.

The worst is still to come. We learn that “a frozen conflict will have to be endured for a very long period of time”, but that it is “better than war”. One wonders whether those who write that actually know what they are saying. They are condemning the Ukrainians who live under Russian occupation to continue doing so for “a very long period of time”. The occupation of some territories has now lasted for more than eighteen months, which is already a very long time for those who are obliged to endure it. It is a barbaric occupation, which begins with rape and looting and continues with arbitrary arrest, torture, the summary execution of men, women and children, filtration, deportation of civilians and kidnapping of Ukrainian children, and plans to flood the occupied zones with Russian immigrants, as was already done in Crimea. By what right can anyone condemn whole populations to endure that and add insult to injury by affirming that it is “better than war.” Nothing is less evident.

As for the idea of Ukraine liberating itself being unrealistic, let us look at the record. There were plenty of people who considered it unrealistic to think that Vietnam could defeat French and then US imperialism. Or that Algeria could win independence. Or that a ragged band in a leaky boat could spark off a revolution in Cuba. But the realists were not so realistic. In the right circumstances, those who fight can make their own realism. Those who do not will never achieve anything. In fact, those who called for ceasefires, negotiations and “peace” in Algeria and Vietnam did not achieve anything.

### **Inter-imperialist rivalry and Ukraine**

The authors of the article attach central importance to their analysis of the war as inter-imperial, in which Ukraine is just a proxy for US imperialism. This seems to be justified, first, because it fits into the confrontation between the US and NATO on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other. And, specifically, the eastward expansion of NATO. Second, by the fact that Ukraine is receiving, mostly from NATO countries, some of the arms that it needs to defend itself.

The confrontation between the established hegemonic world power, the United States, and its putative successor, China, is a central fact of international politics and economics. Russia is not in the same league, but it is big enough to complicate things. So where does Ukraine fit in? As we have said above, Ukraine has chosen to align itself with the West. We should emphasise “chosen”. First, because it is a fact. Second, because the insistence on Ukraine and Ukrainians being somehow manipulated by the US and NATO says two things about those who say this. One is their inability to break out of the mindset that everything bad that happens in the world is the responsibility of the US and NATO. This is an entirely inadequate framework for understanding today’s world, where there are three main imperialisms (US, China and Russia) and a series of secondary imperialisms

(Britain, France, Germany, Japan ... ) that may be allies of the US but also have their own specific interests to defend. Then there are a series of autonomous actors: India, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, among others. The second thing it tells us is that, for them, not only are the rights of small or even not so small nations regarded as expendable, it implies that they see them as having no will of their own, no capacity to act in their own interests. Just pawns on the chessboard.

This is made clear by the way the authors deal with the international situation. At one point they write that “an increasing aggressiveness has emerged in the struggle for hegemony, which is related to the sharpened internal and external contradictions of uneven capitalist development.” This would be a good place to start, but they systematically fall into the caricature of an aggressive US and its allies, which leads, implicitly or explicitly, to the idea that Russia and China are on the defensive. This is mixed in with the latest fashionable word, multipolarity. Now, there is a potentially positive way of defining this word. It could mean the right of every nation to decide its own future and to govern itself. But that is not what it means in the intentions and actions of the great and less great powers who advocate it. What it means for them is the right of every country to do as it likes, with its own people and as far as possible with weaker countries in its environment. Powerful nations rarely, if ever, admit that they dominate other nations simply because they can and because it serves their own interests. They employ ideological justifications. With the United States it is all about defending “democracy” and a “rules-based international order”. Anyone on the left will tell you that. Many of them are much more reticent about dissecting the thoroughly reactionary concepts of the Russian world, of Russia as a unique civilisation. Or China’s pretension to lead the Global South.

The United States, as the hegemonic world power, is obliged to intervene in many places to defend or advance its own position. It is therefore difficult to define a sphere of influence. In a sense, the world is its sphere of influence. This is both an expression of its power and a curse. That was also true of Britain during the two centuries of its hegemony. It is nevertheless clear that for more than ten years, the United States has been seeking to turn its undivided attention to China and the Indo-Pacific region. Getting involved in a war in Europe was in no way planned and did not correspond to US priorities.

## **1. Russia and NATO**

Let us look at Russia, whose aim in the war is defined as “defending its threatened geopolitical position”. That is true and it is the fundamental reason why it is invading Ukraine. Behind the term “geopolitical position” lies the conception of a sphere of influence that covers the territory of the former Soviet Union/Tsarist empire, and also, as far as possible, its former satellites in Eastern and Central Europe. This geopolitical position is threatened. By whom? The authors’ answer is: by the US, NATO and the EU. It is true in the narrow sense that neither the US nor the EU can accept Russia’s right to dominate Eastern Europe. On the other hand, neither the US, NATO nor the EU have the slightest intention of invading Russia. But the real threat to Russia is the resistance of the people who live in the countries it considers part of its sphere of influence.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, the non-Russian republics declared their independence and the countries of the former Soviet bloc transformed their *de jure* independence into *de facto* independence. They joined NATO and, in most cases, the European Union. The Baltic states followed the same path.

When a certain left talks about NATO enlargement, its analysis of why those countries joined NATO is usually reduced to the decisions of Washington. That was one aspect, and an important one. If Washington had been opposed, those countries would never have joined NATO. But it was favourable to them joining because it reinforced and extended the US’ own influence in Europe. However, joining NATO was not imposed on these countries. On the contrary, they campaigned and

lobbied to be accepted. Not only the new ruling groups, but the populations were in favour. Because they had a justified fear of Russia. Ukraine has provided a graphic example of what can happen to a country that is not a member of NATO. Also, because the West represented not only democracy, but the affluent consumer societies to which they aspired. Of course, as it turned out, all that glittered was not gold.

Today, NATO is stronger and more focused than it has been since the end of the Cold War. It has also never been so popular. If you want to convince people that the future does not lie in a military alliance under US leadership, you have to provide them with a credible alternative.

The other former Soviet republics did not follow the same path, most being part of a loose Commonwealth of Independent States and some of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation), a kind of poor person's NATO. Most of the republics recognised Russian predominance but the actual degree of Russian influence varied. At present, it is clear that one effect of the war in Ukraine has been to weaken that influence. This benefits not only the United States, but also China and Turkey. A turn towards these three countries (while maintaining friendly relations with Russia) now forms part of Kazakhstan's policy, as defined in 2022, as do substantial increases in its defence and security budgets. It is worth mentioning that despite its proximity to Russia, Kazakhstan refuses to support its war of aggression in Ukraine. It has also always refused to recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea. In this regard it has a more principled attitude than some of the Western left. Although there is also no doubt a practical consideration: Kazakhstan has a Russian-speaking minority, concentrated in the north of the country. It has an interest in not accepting Russia's right to intervene wherever there are Russian speakers. This summer, US Secretary of State Blinken did a tour of the five central Asian republics. Armenia, traditionally close to Moscow, is now sending humanitarian aid to Ukraine and conducting joint military manoeuvres with the US. This is, of course, not unconnected to Russia's unwillingness/inability to respect its CSTO treaty obligations to defend Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave against Azerbaijan's aggression. (See the statement by the Russian Socialist Movement: [Concerning Azerbaijan's aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh.](#))

## **2. Maidan and Anti-Maidan**

By its size and geographical situation as well as history, Ukraine is central to any project of reconstruction of a Russian empire. Russia never accepted Ukraine's independence. Putin's long historical text in 2021 explaining that Ukrainians and Russians were the same people can be seen as part of the ideological preparation for the coming war. But it is also very probably what he thinks and a view widely shared in Russia. Up until 2014, Putin thought that he could make Ukraine submit by applying political and economic pressure on its governments. This was backed by a network of agents in the state apparatus, especially the police and the armed forces. The extent of this, including generals and politicians who were in Putin's pocket, was largely unveiled in 2014. But it was still partly functional in 2022.

Maidan was the spark that convinced Putin that it was time to resort to force. Even before the victory of Maidan and the flight of Viktor Yanukovich, preparations were under way for the annexation of Crimea and for a process of gradual annexation of eight oblasts in the south and east of Ukraine, collectively called Novorossiya. The plan was to go through a phase of proclamation of "people's republics", which would later ask to join Russia. It was only partly successful in the Donbas.

There are many myths and half-truths about what happened in the Donbas, and more broadly in the south and east of Ukraine, in 2014. Most of the figures that will be given here are taken from a [poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology \(KIIS\) in April 2014](#). It has been frequently

cited, not only because it comes from a reputable source, but for when it was taken. It gives a photograph of opinion in the south and east at the point where pro-Russian militias were seizing town halls all over the Donbas — and trying to do the same elsewhere. What emerges is that, on one important question, concerning a preference for the European Union or the Eurasian Customs Union, the latter was clearly in the majority, overall and in five oblasts out of eight, with three preferring the EU. On a question that was not asked by the KIIS survey, but for which there is plenty of evidence, more people in the south and east were anti-Maidan than pro-Maidan. But most does not mean all. In Kharkiv, the biggest pro-Maidan demonstration was 30,000, in Dnipropetrovsk 15,000. Even in Donetsk, the biggest pro-Maidan demonstration was 10,000, as against 30,000 for the biggest anti-Maidan rally.

On other questions, there is not much joy for the anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russia lobby. To the question “Do you support those who with arms capture administrative buildings in your region?” (which was happening as the poll was taken), there was little support: less than 12 per cent globally, 18 per cent in Donetsk, 24 per cent in Luhansk, elsewhere no oblast reached double figures.

There were anti-Maidan protests, with real popular support in the Donbas. They were not demanding to join Russia: they were protesting against a movement based on the centre and the west that they saw as having taken power in Kyiv. They also had justifiable grievances against the central government, which did not date from Maidan. And, like the Maidan movement, they were protesting against corruption and thieving politicians.

Which brings us to Yanukovich. To the question whether Yanukovich was the legitimate president there was no majority anywhere. Between 27 and 31 per cent in the Donbas, much less elsewhere. It is possible to consider the anti-Maidan demonstrations as embryonic popular uprisings. It would have been interesting to see how the movement evolved, but it was cut short by the militarisation of the situation through a series of mini-coups d'état in towns and cities, one after another. This was the basis of the “people’s republics”. The whole operation was conducted under the leadership of Russian agents, with Russian “volunteers”, Russian money and Russian arms. Those in the Donbas who followed were not in the majority. In fact, there has never been majority support for joining Russia in the Donbas, neither in an election, referendum or poll. In the KIIS poll, while around 30 per cent were in favour of joining Russia, more than 50 per cent were against.

Given the way the Donbas was taken over and the subsequent intervention of the Ukrainian army, it is a complete distortion to speak of a civil war (see [Daria Saburova's "Questions About Ukraine"](#)). Even without the direct intervention of the Russian army in 2013-14 and its continuing involvement in the low-intensity war from 2014-22, it was clearly from the beginning an intervention by Russia in Ukraine.

### **C. Russia and the international context**

Let us look now at the international dimension. Without going into details, it seems a good working hypothesis to say that the period of globalisation that began in the 1980s is over. Historically, the end of periods of globalisation leads to increased inter-imperialist competition. No one on the left would contest that the US is imperialist. This can also be said about Britain, Germany, France and some lesser European countries, as well as Japan. For reasons that are rarely if ever enunciated, there is a general idea on the left that the emancipation of Europe, specifically the EU, from US hegemony would be somehow in itself progressive. This is far from evident and would at least merit serious analysis.

To characterise Russia and especially China as imperialist is more controversial. But let us recall

Lenin's description of Russia in 1916. "Russia had already in peacetime beaten the world record for the oppression of nations on the basis of an imperialism much more crude, medieval, economically backward, military and bureaucratic." (See ["The discussion on self-determination summed up", Collected Works, Vol. 22](#)). Elsewhere he spoke simply of Russian military-feudal imperialism. Not much mention there of finance capital, monopolies or export of capital. The point is that Lenin did not find it necessary for a country to tick all the boxes to be imperialist. In Russia's case, the colonial and military criteria seem to suffice. Alongside that, the Russian economy was largely dominated by French, German and British capital (in that order).

Increased competition between the great and not so great powers takes place on the economic, political and military levels. This is a characteristic of capitalism and imperialism. It is in their nature. It is highly probable that it will lead to war at some point. As Rosa Luxemburg said, war is as much a logical consequence of capitalism as armed peace (["Peace Utopias", 1911](#)).

The confrontation between the US and China, which really began to become acute after 2008, has been relatively peaceful and economic, but not completely. China has pursued an aggressive policy in the so-called South China Sea, by constructing largely artificial and highly militarised islands in international waters and encroaching on the territorial waters of Vietnam and the Philippines. Of course, the US has not failed to take advantage of the situation. It has obtained several bases in the Philippines and reinforced diplomatic links and Vietnam, as exemplified by the recent well-publicised visit of US President Joe Biden to Hanoi. Of course, it is possible to see all that as US-inspired provocations against China. That would frankly be to turn the situation on its head. It is China that launched provocations against Vietnam and the Philippines, and it is the United States which is taking advantage of it. But beyond such details, fundamentally, the United States is determined to maintain its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region while China is determined to establish its hegemony. That is the reality. It will lead to tensions and conflicts in the South and East China Seas, over Taiwan and in competition to influence Pacific nations.

A serious approach to the international situation would necessitate abandoning the tired old refrain of constantly denouncing US imperialism and its allies, especially NATO, while finding excuses for Russia and China. This seems beyond part of the European and North American left. It is not beyond the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) (see [Kimitoshi Morihara \(Japanese Communist Party\): 'Indo-Pacific must be a region of dialogue and cooperation, not rivalry'](#)) . The JCP strongly opposes militarisation in Japan and its integration into the anti-Chinese system of alliances that Washington is putting in place. But it also clearly criticises what it calls Chinese hegemonism and Great Power chauvinism. This covers among other things, criticism of human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and defence of the right of self-determination for Taiwan (and evidently, opposition to the use of force by China). Concerning Russia's war in Ukraine, the JCP denounces Russia's aggression and demands an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Russian military forces.

When people on the campist left speak about Russia, the way they do it says a lot about them. Russia has been threatened by NATO's enlargement. Its reaction in invading Ukraine cannot be approved of, but the fault really lies with the United States and NATO. We have to understand Russia and make a peace that takes into account its legitimate concerns. And so on.

## **1. Nature of Russia**

But what is Russia? That is the question that they do not pose. In principle, a federal republic but, in fact, the (substantial) remains of an empire. Of the six empires that went to war in 1914 (Germany, France, Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Turkey), it is the only one that remains. Russia is not a nation-state but an empire. The authors of the document talk about NATO "excluding Russia from Europe". But there is no need to do that. Russia excluded itself from Europe when it crossed the



Urals and over three centuries conquered its way east to the Pacific and south into Central Asia. Or to be precise, it excluded itself from being a purely European state and became a Eurasian empire. Indeed, even before venturing into Asia it was already an empire, with many consequences that we cannot go into here. But repeating “Russia is part of Europe” will not get us anywhere.

Politically, what is Russia? Officially a democracy, but that is a joke, as the recent regional elections have illustrated. It is, at the very least, the most internally repressive and externally aggressive state intervening in Europe. In the discussions among Russian oppositionists and those who closely follow events in Russia, the question of fascism is central. Let us look at the main features of Russia. We have the great leader: the cult of Putin is modest compared to the Kim dynasty in North Korea, or even to Xi Jinping in China, but it is more than for any Russian leader since Stalin. Despite the trappings of parliamentary democracy, the regime is not subject to any democratic control. The most basic democratic rights (of expression, meeting, demonstration) are suppressed. There is no free press, nor any free unions. The social and ideological climate is patriarchal, misogynist, homophobic. And above all impregnated with Great Russian chauvinism, which is now taught in schools and applied in Ukraine. There is ongoing debate as to how to define Russia: fascist (the historian Timothy Snyder, the Russian socialist and writer Ilya Budraitskis), neo-fascist (the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek), para-fascist, post-fascist, fascistic. It is clear that Russian fascism does not tally with “classical” fascism of the 1920s and 30s, but that does not exhaust the question.

Is Russia imperialist? Lenin thought so, and he was well aware of the extent to which foreign capital controlled its economy. That has changed now: today there is an autonomous national Russian capital. A mixture of state and private capital, heavily weighted towards the primary sector—oil, gas, minerals... (See Michael Pröbsting, “[Russian imperialism and its monopolies](#)”). But the fact that Russia has economic interests to defend does not mean that was the motivation for the war. There is an autonomy of the political (or geopolitical) dimension. Ukraine is key to any Russian imperial project, even at considerable cost to the economy in the short term.

Let us repeat: to understand the world today, it is necessary to get away from the idea that it is the United States and its allies that initiate everything. There are sharpening inter-imperialist and anti-capitalist contradictions. This creates struggles for power and the creation or reinforcement of blocs. The principal players are the United States, China and Russia. But there are other, autonomous actors, as cited above.

Regarding blocs, the United States is streets ahead: NATO, the Quad, AUKUS, etc. The countries that support Russia (as against abstaining) are a sorry collection - Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Syria, Nicaragua... Much of the organised support for Russia in Europe comes from far-right parties, even though some have become more discreet since the war started. China has very few allies in its near environment - Cambodia and the Myanmar junta. The fact is that many of China’s neighbours are more allied with the United States, precisely because they are China’s neighbours.

## **2. Camps in world politics**

If we want to look at things in terms of camps, it is clear that there is a Western camp, in the larger sense. During the Cold War there was definitely a Soviet camp. It is much less clear whether today there is a Russian or Chinese camp. It is at this point that we begin to hear the music of the BRICS and the Global South, which is sometimes spoken about as if it was an actual or potential anti-Western camp. Who makes up this camp? Sometimes everyone except Europe, North America and North-East Asia. What are the criteria? In the 1950s there was the Non-Aligned Movement, which was precisely that, attached to neither bloc and in support of movements of national liberation.

What unites the BRICS or the Global South? In the very broad sense, a search for ways to find an

alternative to the Western “rules-based” world. But that is very vague. The document writes of “the attempt of many states of the world to move towards a multipolar non-imperial order of common security”. First, it seems that economic autonomy is just as, if not more, important than common security. Second, it is more than obvious that Russia and China seek to use the BRICS and the notion of the Global South as leverage against the United States. The idea of China as leader of the Global South may seem fanciful. China is in fact one of the main exploiters of the Global South, through unequal trade and debt, notably. But it does have a very clear objective in that regard (see [“China, leader of the Global South?”](#)) Russia also exploits the Global South, but with less economic power. It is no accident that its penetration of Africa was carried out by the Wagner group, with its characteristic thuggish methods. From Lenin’s 1916 definition of Russian imperialism, we can retain at least, crude, military and bureaucratic.

Beyond that, the Global South is extremely heterogeneous. It always was, at the time when it was known as the Third World, but this is much more accentuated today. Alongside classically dependent countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, there is India which aspires to join the big boys’ club and is in a class of its own. There are the petro-monarchies of the Gulf, in particular Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Countries such as Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, Turkey and Iran are what might be called intermediate powers. It is more interesting to analyse the reality of the Global South than to make broad generalities. Just as it is more fruitful to analyse Russia and China than to define them essentially by their opposition to the United States. Furthermore, the rather trite schema of declining US hegemony and the rise of China needs to be looked at critically. It may well be that the United States is not declining as quickly as is often said and China is not going to overtake it in the near future, or perhaps ever. If we look at the BRICS members and the Global South generally, we will see that the degree of imbrication with the Western-led economic order is often considerable. Nowhere is this truer than in India.

Let us look at the penultimate section of the document. “Peace ... requires, above all, a policy of common security as its basis. This is the opposite of imperialist policy, which sooner or later leads to imperialist wars.” This is a remarkable statement. A policy can be adopted and then discarded in favour of something else. But imperialism is not a policy: a hundred years ago Lenin polemicised against Karl Kautsky who thought it was. Imperialism is a stage of capitalism, and it leads to imperialist wars. Which are not only wars between imperialist states, something we have not seen since 1945, but wars by imperialist states (and indeed other states) to defend or extend their own economic, political and military power. There have been many such wars; Ukraine is the latest.

“It must be clear to everyone that the USA has been the driving force behind almost all wars on the EU’s doorstep since 1991,” says the document. Well, first, it depends on how you define doorstep. Iraq and Afghanistan are not exactly on the EU’s doorstep. Libya could be so defined, but the bombing war in 2011 was conducted by Britain and France, admittedly with US support. Chechnya is much more on the EU’s doorstep. But the driving force there was not the United States, but Russia. As in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine since 2014. Frankly, this permanent double standard is past its sell-by date. In fact, since the fall of the Soviet Union, all of Russia’s wars, except Syria, have been in Europe. The Balkan wars of the 1990s were not down to Russia and its influence was marginal. The United States and NATO played more of a role, but the driving force of those wars came from contradictions inherent in Yugoslavia, and in particular the post-Yugoslav ambitions of Serbia.

#### **D. NATO and Europe**

We constantly hear, and again in this document, as if it was axiomatic, that things would be better if

Europe/the EU emancipated itself from the tutelage of the United States. This is far from obvious. There is nothing nice about European imperialism. All the wars since 1991... Why start there? Why not in 1945? We would find colonial wars, war crimes, massacres, concerning France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Portugal. Not back in the nineteenth century, but within living memory. France in particular has continued to intervene in Africa right up to the present, though it seems that its time may have finally run out.

The countries of Europe have no more colonies of any importance, though France (again) has still to let go of New Caledonia/Kanaky. But the intense exploitation of countries of the Global South is now conducted peacefully by the EU and especially its imperialist core, in particular but not only in Africa.

So, would Europe be better off without the US (and without NATO, because NATO is a military alliance led by, paid for and largely armed by the US)? Let us look for a moment at NATO. As is well-known, it never fired a shot in anger throughout the Cold War. But it did have large, well-armed forces and military budgets to pay for them. It intervened in the Balkans in the 1990s and Afghanistan from 2001, but neither was a major operation compared to the war in Ukraine. Despite a discourse to the contrary on the left, NATO did not remain a highly militarised alliance after 1991. In fact, defence budgets were reduced and armies became smaller and under-equipped. Even after the events of 2013-14 in Ukraine, there was very little change. There was talk of a European army, especially from France. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her various French counterparts spent years trying and failing to appease Putin. In this context, the offer made in 2008 to Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO appears as something of an aberration. [France and Germany were always firmly opposed. As was former US President Barack Obama](#). Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO did not frighten Putin, because he knew the risk was non-existent. Ukraine was no nearer to joining NATO on February 24, 2022, than it had been in 2008.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine changed everything. For the first time in Europe since 1945, one country launched a full-scale war on another. Yes, there was 1974 in Cyprus and then the Balkan Wars in the 1990s. But the present war is unprecedented for its scale and the fact that it was initiated by Russia, a major nuclear power. So, what about NATO's "proxy war"? If NATO had a plan to launch a proxy war it would have started arming Ukraine in 2014 but it did not. NATO and the US were taken by surprise and reacted to events. They only started seriously arming Ukraine once it had proved its ability to stop Russia before entering Kyiv and made it abandon the north (see [Military Assistance to Ukraine: Rediscovering the Virtue of Courage](#)).

That is how it happened. Russia was surprised by the resistance of Ukraine and perhaps even more surprised by the reaction of NATO. Wars change many things, which do not always correspond to the intentions of those who start them. This war was supposed to demonstrate Russia's military might. Instead, it revealed its weaknesses. It was meant to lead to a Ukraine that was weak, divided and subjugated to Russia. Ukraine has never been so strongly united in defence of its independence. NATO was meant to be too weak and divided to react. It has never been so effective and united since the end of the Cold War and popular or at least accepted as a necessary evil.

The document says: "The left has always criticised NATO's expansive and aggressive policy." Indeed, it has. Without always paying much attention to the facts. As we have seen, NATO's military engagements have been limited. Perhaps by "expansive and aggressive" the authors mean that NATO's expansion since 1999 is in itself aggressive? Quite probably. This discourse may have been suitable for a period when most people were not particularly thinking about NATO. But the war has changed that. In the first place it has shown on a hitherto unprecedented scale the aggressive nature of Russian imperialism. Particularly in countries bordering on or close to Russia the lesson was that if you are in NATO, you do not get invaded (so far, anyway), and if you are not in NATO,

look at what happens to you. If the authors of this document think that they can still get away with the old anti-NATO discourse (calls for leaving NATO, dissolving NATO...), they are profoundly mistaken.

The authors write of “parts of the Scandinavian left, which increasingly view NATO as a defensive alliance”. They could also have added that a big majority of people in the countries that are members of NATO (and beyond...) think exactly that. But they do not because it does not fit into their schema. Once again, one has the very strong impression that what the people concerned think is of little importance compared to geopolitical “solutions”, which do not in fact solve anything. The Nordic Green Left are no doubt perfectly aware that “NATO is not an alliance for the defence of democracy in Europe but serves the hegemonic interests of the USA”. But that in itself solves nothing. It is necessary to find an alternative that does defend the countries of Europe, their peoples and, yes, their democracy. An alternative that is concrete and feasible.

## **1. Democracy versus dictatorship?**

Let us digress for a moment. It is clear that the fundamental conflict between China, the United States, Russia and other countries is based on questions of inter-imperialist rivalry revolving around economic, political and military power and sometimes territorial claims. Not about democracy versus dictatorship. If we take the United States, it has had no compunction about allying with dictatorships, notably in Latin America and the Middle East. It has even just concluded agreements for strengthened relations with Vietnam, which is not a democracy. Nevertheless, when we look at the US’ allies in NATO and the EU and in South and East Asia, they are virtually all democracies. Facing that is a democracy-free zone from Minsk to Pyongyang. It would be naïve to think that the United States and its allies would not take advantage of that — and they do. In the countries concerned, for example the Baltic states in Europe and Taiwan in Asia, the populations know that occupation by Russia or China would not only mean the end of their independence, but also of their democratic rights. This also applies to Ukraine. Conversely, although Russia’s motives for crushing Ukraine are not intrinsically based on democracy, the fact of having a democracy in such proximity is more than an irritation. So, although the question of democracy is not the root cause of conflicts, it is much more tangible for people than theories of imperialism. It becomes a factor in the situation.

The document argues in favour of a decoupling between Europe and the US. “The left must therefore clearly reject the subordination of the security policy of the EU to the imperial claims for supremacy of the US”. Further on, “The EU’s inability to assert itself independently in terms of security policy is the cause of its subordination to NATO.” This explains nothing. Frankly, we could just as well say that “the EU’s subordination to NATO is the cause of its inability to assert itself independently.” This discourse is very common on the left. It is also not so far removed from French President Emmanuel Macron’s repeated calls for the “strategic autonomy” of Europe. Indeed, the document writes “the demand for a strategic autonomy for Europe must be tackled seriously by the left.”

NATO is a military alliance led by the US. So why do European countries accept this US leadership? During the Cold War it was accepted because there was a common enemy and the United States was far and away the most powerful military force. What happened after the end of the Cold War? NATO’s relatively limited but nevertheless decisive intervention in the Balkan wars underlined one thing. Europe was incapable of bringing these wars to an end. It needed NATO, hence the US. It was hardly an accident that the accords that ended the Bosnian war were signed in Dayton, Ohio. Then there was NATO’s engagement in Afghanistan as part of the US-led “War on Terror”, a criminal operation that turned out to be pointless; and its 2011 intervention in Libya, resulting in the effective dismemberment of that country. After these, more questions began to be asked about NATO’s future.

That phase is over now. Russia's invasion of Ukraine provided a convincing case for the necessity of a military alliance. That is not what much of the left wants to hear, but it is the truth. So where do we go from here? The shuttle diplomacy by Merkel and her various French partners was based on the idea that Russia could be integrated into the European family of nations. There was a price to pay. The price was the acceptance of a "grey zone" between the EU/NATO and Russia: Ukraine and the republics of the South Caucasus. So, no membership of NATO or the EU for Ukraine and Georgia, but no Russian troops either. But Russia did not want a grey zone, it wanted Ukraine as part of its zone. It wanted, as a minimum, the demilitarisation of NATO member states in Central and Eastern Europe. The outcome of the war so far is that these states have become more, not less, militarised and Ukraine now has at least the possibility of joining NATO and the EU. Whether it does or not depends on the outcome of the war.

### **E. What alternative for a just peace?**

The last part of the document deals with the need for "an alternative collective security concept for Europe". Let us look first at the reasoning: "The EU states — including the German government, which was initially somewhat hesitant — are now fully committed to the mission of defending the dominance of the US and thus, as its allies, also their own privileged position. This is not only about Russia, but above all, also against China." This is quite a good description. We should underline "also their own privileged position". That is the most important thing. But when we say EU states, we should be more precise. All EU states are equal, but some are decidedly more equal than others. The really privileged ones are, above all, France and Germany, along with smaller imperialist states and hangers-on. We should add Britain, even though it is not in the EU. These secondary imperialist powers do not have the military power to defend their privileges. They need a protector, and the obvious one is the United States. France and Germany may have thought that they could escape from that by neutralising Russia. If so, they were mistaken.

When the authors of the document talk about European strategic autonomy, it is not entirely spelled out, but the reasoning seems to be that an EU freed from US hegemony would be able to develop an independent foreign policy and deal with the rest of the world (and Russia, in particular) on that basis. However, the main conflict in the world is not "between the efforts of the US and its allies to maintain its own imperial supremacy" — which is true — "and the attempt of many states of the world to move towards a multipolar order of common security" — which is not an explanation of anything. The main conflict is between the US and its allies on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other. Neither of which is non-imperial, quite the contrary.

#### **1. 'Collective security'**

Let us look at the aspiration to peace and collective security. First, it cannot be said too often that the principal powers and some others are motivated by their material and geopolitical interests. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an expression of that. The result is a war between Russia and Ukraine. What is wrong with the notion of "inter-imperial war"? Most obviously, only one imperialism is actually at war. But Ukraine is just a proxy for the other imperialists, we hear. Is there a precedent for this? Yes, there is: the Vietnam War. Only the United States and a few allies were at war against Vietnam. Neither the Soviet Union nor China were at war. But they provided an enormous amount of aid to Vietnam, not just comparable to that given to Ukraine today but even more considerable. Although it was not publicised at the time, there were both Soviet and Chinese forces in Vietnam. Did anyone talk of a proxy war then? Certainly not anyone on the left. But there were many on the right who explained that this was not just a war with Vietnam, because behind Vietnam was "international Communism" that was planning to take over the "free world". But for all

the help received, it was Vietnam's war and although it maintained close relations with the Soviet Union in particular, after the war, Vietnam was never anyone's satellite.

Looking at the logic of the document we see that it starts by sacrificing Ukraine on the altar in search of "a comprehensive system of common security which includes Russia." We have already dealt with the price Russia would demand to be part of any common security system. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spent many years negotiating alongside Merkel with Putin. Now he says that he cannot imagine a partnership with Putin's Russia. It would probably be a mistake to interpret that just as a rejection of Putin as a person, though the latter's duplicity no doubt played a role.

More importantly it was a rejection of Russia's delusions of imperial grandeur. The authors seem to regret the abandonment of European strategic autonomy, despite the hesitations of Germany. But we may be looking at a certain form of strategic autonomy. The form that the document advocates would detach Europe from the United States and seek the form of a European security that includes Russia. This perspective was unconvincing before the present war, it is totally redundant now. The first result of the war was to unite NATO in support of Ukraine. It also reinforced the credibility of countries such as Poland and the Baltic states, who had been warning for years about the danger Russia represented, and dented somewhat the authority of the Franco-German couple. The latest developments are quite intriguing. [According to the Kiel Institute](#), especially if we look at long-term commitments, US aid to Ukraine is being overtaken by Europe. And who is taking the lead among the European powers? Germany, followed by Britain. And where is France? Down there among the laggards. Is this the beginning of a sort of European strategic autonomy? Maybe in a sense. Not by breaking with the United States, but by becoming less dependent on it. And not by appeasing Russia, but by confronting it. We will have to see how things develop.

## **2. Alternatives to NATO and the struggle for peace**

This leaves open the question: is there an alternative to NATO? And if so, what is it? There is no easy answer. If we accept that there is not going to be a peaceful world any time soon, Europe must be able to defend itself. A European defence alliance is conceivable, but not so simple. It raises a series of problems for the left that we can only touch on here: conscription or not, soldiers' rights, military budgets.... The fundamental question is: what kind of army to defend what kind of society?

The last part of the document is the one that poses the most fundamental questions. The problem is not the question of a system of collective security, or indeed of peace, which are entirely desirable objectives. The problem is how to get there. Lenin and Luxemburg had an answer: it was impossible to put an end to militarism and war without putting an end to capitalism. There is absolutely no doubt that is what they argued, one could fill pages with their quotes. What has changed since then was that during World War I and in its aftermath, socialist revolution and the end of capitalism looked like real possibilities. This is hardly the case today.

What has not changed is that it is still illusory to think that we can put an end to wars and militarism, and find a system of collective security without confronting imperialism and capitalism. In fact, the fight against war, for disarmament, for a system of collective security should form part of a program of social transformation, a socialist program. It would be an understatement to say that perspectives for social transformation in Europe have rarely seemed so distant. It is even more necessary to turn the page on vague notions of a social, democratic, ecological, etc Europe, and organise around programs that challenge capitalism. The fight against militarism and war should form part of that.

Taking up demands for peace and collective security in isolation can only amount to appeals to the existing powers. Here is what Rosa Luxemburg had to say on the subject, when explaining the need

for an independent working-class policy during World War I: “But this policy cannot consist of working up ingenious blueprints for capitalist diplomacy ... on how to conclude peace and assure future peaceful and democratic development”. After developing further her arguments, she concludes with the ironic “these demands might much more consistently be united into the simple slogan, ‘abolition of the capitalist class state’.”([The “Junius Letter,” 1916](#)).

Luxemburg develops these ideas at much greater length, with a merciless critique of pacifism, in her 1911 article “Peace Utopias”. In this article she lists the rather long list of wars of the previous 15 years and asks: “Where is the tendency towards peace, disarmament and the arbitrary settling of differences?”

Closer to our own time, we could do the same thing — in two stages — without going into all the details here. First, from 1945 to 1989-91, colonial wars, especially in Africa, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan. From 1991, Iraq, Afghanistan, but also the Balkan wars, Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, Yemen. From 1945 to 1991, as far as Europe was concerned, war was an export product. Since 1991, war has returned to Europe. Without being any less entrenched elsewhere. None of these wars fall into the category of inter-imperialist wars. They were almost all wars conducted by imperialist and colonialist states to keep or gain territories and influence.

Wars are armed expressions of conflicts between countries — political, economic, geopolitical. They are the expression of contradictions that at certain moments break out into open war. From 1945 until the 1970s, there was a huge movement of colonial peoples seeking independence from European colonial empires. This movement brought an end to these European empires, above all the British and French, with emblematic struggles in South-East Asia, Algeria, the Portuguese colonies, etc. The fall of Apartheid in South Africa was also part of this movement. In whatever form it was expressed, there was very broad support and sympathy on the left in Europe and elsewhere. There was also support from the Soviet Union and China. After 1991, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were launched by US imperialism, the left had no problem in opposing them.

From 1991, when war came to Europe, things became more complicated. Some people on the left tried to make the post-Yugoslav wars fit into an analysis where the break-up of Yugoslavia was due to the machinations of Western imperialism. It was hard to do that in Chechnya, but there was very little international solidarity with Chechnya. It was the first sign that when Russia was doing it, it was not the same as if Western imperialism was doing it. That was continued on a larger scale with Georgia, Syria and, especially, Ukraine.

What was never useful, whether in the colonial wars or in Europe, was to call for ceasefires, negotiations and peace. What was never useful were “ingenious blueprints”. What was useful was to help those movements, politically and materially, and to popularise their struggles. That effort helped achieve the only possible acceptable peace — one guaranteeing the comprehensive defeat of the aggressor and the ability of its victim to live free of the threat of renewed assault. That must be the goal of the European Left in relation to Ukraine.

I have attached two annexes. First, the position adopted by the British Trade Union Congress on Ukraine. Second, the speech by a representative of Feminist Anti-War Resistance of Russia on receiving the Aachen Peace Prize. What unites these two texts, emanating from very different circumstances, is a concept and a word that is missing from the document we have examined: solidarity.

Bierbaum and Brie’s document ends by expressing the view that the coming European elections will be an excellent opportunity to lead a campaign along the lines of its logic and proposals. The authors cannot possibly believe that this can unite the broadest left forces. We can easily see who might be

attracted to their proposals. We can also see who would refuse to get involved in a campaign that completely refuses to help Ukraine.

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## **Annex 1: TUC Congress — A victory for solidarity with Ukraine, a victory for truth**

*Ukraine Solidarity Campaign*

September 14, 2023

On 12 September the Trade Union Congress which unites trade unions representing more than 5.5 million workers who are members of 48 trade unions adopted by an overwhelming majority a policy of Solidarity with Ukraine

This vote was secured in defiance of a relentless campaign of disinformation by those seeking to undermine support for Ukraine. A broad coalition of solidarity made this victory possible; the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign extends its gratitude to the Ukrainian trade unions, social democrats and democratic socialists who assisted us despite their own challenges. The trade unions GMB, ASLEF and NUM played a central role in building support as did our friends in the Parliamentary Labour Party.

The full policy adopted is copied below, this is an historic achievement, and it is now crucial we now see a redoubled effort to increase direct solidarity from the movement.

### **Solidarity with Ukraine**

Congress unequivocally condemns Russia's illegal, aggressive invasion of Ukraine.

Congress notes:

1. The systematic repression of free trade unions under Putin and Lukashenko, and their suppression in the occupied territories of Ukraine since 2014.
2. Appeals from Ukrainian unions for moral and material aid, including the means of Ukraine's self-defence.
3. That those who suffer most in times of war are the working class, and that the labour movement must do all it can to prevent conflict; however, that is not always possible.
4. The TUC's proud history of solidarity with victims of fascist, imperialist aggression including its support for arms to the Spanish Republic. As trade unionists we are inherently anti-imperialistic, and our job is to fight imperialism and tyranny at every opportunity. We recognise that a victory for Putin in Ukraine will be a success for reactionary authoritarian politics across the world.
5. The horrendous human and environmental cost of the Ukraine conflict. Millions of people have been forced to abandon their homes and flee, while many others have lost their lives.
6. The Russian program of ethnic cleansing.
7. That trade unions across Ukraine have shown true solidarity and support by offering shelter and



food to refugees. ASLEF has worked closely with Ukrainian rail unions and seen the tremendous work that they have done to support workers in these times of conflict.

Congress affirms:

- a) Its support for civil and labour rights in Russia and Belarus and the immediate release of trade union prisoners
- b) Its belief that there can be no just or enduring peace while the Russian state continues its denial of Ukrainian sovereignty
- c) Its solidarity with the Ukrainian people, including refugees whose sanctuary has been delayed or denied by the UK Government
- d) That reconstruction of Ukraine must have labour and union values at its centre

Congress supports:

- i. The immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territories occupied since 2014
- ii. Ukrainian unions' calls for financial and practical aid from the UK to Ukraine
- iii. A peaceful end to the conflict that secures the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the support and self-determination of the Ukrainian people.
- iv. The full restoration of labour rights in Ukraine and a socially-just reconstruction and re development program that embeds collective bargaining and rejects deregulation and privatisation
- v. TUC work, and facilitation of affiliates' engagement, with the main Ukrainian trade union centres (FPU/KVPU), and acknowledges the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign

Congress therefore instructs the General Council to:

1. Send solidarity to all Ukrainian trade unionists who are fighting for workers' rights and against imperialism every day
2. Engage with Ukrainian trade unions from both trade union centres, and a wide range of union members and ideas
3. Stand with Ukrainian people in the UK and support them in whatever means available until they can safely return home

*Mover: GMB*

*Seconder: ASLEF*

*Supporter: NUM*

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## **Annex 2: Text of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance speech for the Aachen Peace Prize**

September 1, 2023

We thank the Aachen Peace Prize committee for the award and for expressing invaluable support and solidarity with our activists. We are honoured to receive this award together with the Human Rights Defenders Fund (Israel), who are fighting for the rights of activist women under constant threat from their government.

We are not showing our faces today because being here is not only an honour, but also a great privilege and responsibility. Most of our fellow women colleagues are in Russia and cannot reveal their faces and names without the risk of being imprisoned or tortured by Russian security forces.

We receive this award while there is a war going on and our state is bombing Ukraine every day, while the Ukrainian army and civilians are heroically resisting this unprovoked aggression.

We receive this award while our fellow women continue their struggle in Russia - our movement exists because of their courage and resistance to the Russian regime.

Feminist Anti-War Resistance emerged on 25 February 2022 as a response to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Today we are dozens of autonomous cells and groups in Russia and abroad. We include indigenous activists, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, people with migration and refugee experience, people who have experienced various forms of violence and discrimination. We are building networks of mutual support with other anti-war movements and activist groups to unite and politicise more people who are ready to build together a foundation for a future Russia free from dictatorship, repression, militarism, imperialism and violence.

War is a continuation of patriarchal violence, one of its extreme manifestations, which always parasitises the vulnerable and unprotected.

War means millions of people forced to leave their homes, thousands of Ukrainians wounded, killed and tortured by the Russian military. Ukrainians forcibly displaced to Russia live in inhumane conditions, with no support from anyone but their relatives and volunteers and are under constant pressure from the Russian state. Thousands of Ukrainian civilians are being held captive by the Russian military and nothing is known about their fate. Thousands of Ukrainian children have been kidnapped by Russia.

We often repeat: "War begins at home". Domestic violence, violence against women, children and the elderly is violence that has been encouraged and nurtured by the Russian state for years. It has long ago spilled out of our homes and transcended state borders. All violence is connected - and all violence must stop. War begins at home, and it must end at home. For it feeds on the violence within our society. That is why feminism is an inseparable part of resistance to war.

In Russia, women are already facing violence from soldiers returning from war. Many prisoners who served time in prison for brutal crimes have been mobilised, have already returned from the war and are walking free, having received pardons and medals for all their war crimes. Russia is increasingly adopting discriminatory laws that violate human rights. In particular, laws that make life unbearable for LGBTQ+ people in Russia. A new law banning gender affirmative procedures and changing the gender marker on documents. Thousands of indigenous people still live under Russian occupation, and those who try to fight for their rights face systematic repression.

Peace is not limited to a ceasefire. We want peace not only without overt military violence, but also without structural violence. Such a peace also requires the full inclusion of representatives of vulnerable groups in any pre-negotiation processes and peace making. Such a peace requires active struggle and cannot be fooled by a mere ceasefire.

We call ourselves Feminist Anti-War Resistance, but we are well aware that being "anti-war" is not

about privileged pacifism, but about recognising the right of the affected party to self-defence. Ukrainian women cannot say “no to war” to a war that has already come to their home. They cannot say “this is not our war”. They are forced to defend and protect their home and loved ones - and often at the cost of their lives.

We want to be understood correctly: “anti-war” in our case is not the idle waiting for an abstract peace to come when one side runs out of resources. “Anti-war” is a daily resistance to the aggressor and his military and imperial ambitions. Resistance including thousands of women, queer people, activists and feminists. And this honour belongs to them.

As long as Putin and this regime exists in Russia - there will be no peace. As long as people and territories are under occupation - there will be no peace. Peace cannot be considered peace when political prisoners are in jail and activists who have fled the country cannot return home safely. Such “peace” does not take into account the rights of vast numbers of vulnerable people.

We want peace, but we want a just peace, without occupied territories, without slavery and torture, without prisons and exploitation, without dictatorships, without silencing violence in any form.

We want to dedicate this award to Russian women and LGBTQ+ people who have been criminally prosecuted for their anti-war actions, identity and views, who are sitting in pre-trial detention centres and prisons. Activists who have experienced searches and torture, faced violence for anti-war agitation and for helping Ukrainians. These are not only activists of our movement, but they are also thousands of stories of resistance to Russian fascism, stories of schoolgirls and pensioners alike.

We dedicate this award to Maria Ponomarenko, Sasha Skochilenko, Natalia Filonova, Tatiana Savinkina, Marina Novikova, Victoria Petrova, Masha Moskalyova and all those whom we are unable to name today for security reasons.

We will donate the cash equivalent of this award to a Ukrainian feminist organisation and a Russian initiative helping political prisoners. We express our support and solidarity to Ukrainians in their struggle for freedom. Thank you.

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**Murray Smith**

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**P.S.**

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<https://links.org.au/european-left-leaders-ukraine-not-even-hint-solidarity>