

Anti-imperialists in Scotland must stand with Palestine AND Ukraine

Saturday 30 March 2024, by [CAMPBELL Graham](#) (Date first published: 4 March 2024).

SNP Glasgow City Councillor and Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland founder member Graham Campbell explains why we must support both the Ukrainians and the Palestinians in their fight against their Russian and US and UK government backed Israeli oppressors respectively.

Wales's national day was rather overshadowed by the George Galloway by-election victory, the passing of the 30,000 mark in Palestinian civilians murdered by Israel; by Sunak's appalling anti-democratic speech outside Downing St and the funeral of Alexei Navalny as thousands braved the risk of arrest by Putin's regime to say "niet wojny" - "No to War" in Ukraine.

But facts are stubborn things: 73% of Scots back an immediate ceasefire in Gaza - as do most of their politicians in SNP and Scottish Labour, as well as Green and Liberal Democrats. Scotland supports Palestinians against their Israeli government occupiers and oppressors who have committed war crimes and acts that amount to genocide. Their righteous anger has been given voice by the tireless organising of the Gaza Genocide Emergency Committee (GSEC) with daily and weekly protests across Scotland to give vent to our common anger at the lack of opposition to the massacre of Palestinians by Israeli Defence Forces from the UK's main parties; the Tories and Labour.

The shenanigans of the House of Commons Speaker appearing to collaborate with the Labour front bench to scupper a straightforward vote on an SNP motion further enraged voters in Greater Manchester. No doubt both Sunak and Starmer would label these supporters of Palestine as backing extremism and antisemitism, but Rochdale folk rightly wanted to see justice for Palestine and they used this opportunity to hit back at Labour's obscene staunchly pro-imperialist pro-Israeli foreign policy. With Gorgeous George back in Westminster as a thorn in Keir Starmer's side, Labour now risk losing millions more Muslim and non-Muslim voters alike in much of urban England, and to the SNP in Scotland. Failing to condemn genocide has clear electoral consequences and Labour cannot take anyone's votes for granted.

But we should never forget UK imperialism's role in creating this mess back in 1947/8. UK foreign policy based on the myth of its superpower role - of which the anachronistic UN Security Council veto and defective Trident missiles are the last vestiges - still motivates its actions today as it consistently takes the wrong side. We need a foreign policy and a state (an independent Scotland) that reflects Scotland's left social anti-imperialist, anti-nuclear, democratic values - values we share with many other people across the world.

As a pan-African socialist and anti-racist activist it's always been part of my worldview to challenge imperialism in all its forms and from all sides. It can be summed up in the SWP-created slogan "Neither Washington Nor Moscow but International Socialism". It is anti-UK and anti-US imperialism but is also emphatically anti-Russian imperialism.

Central to post-1968 radical thinking was young people revolting in France and opposing the US war in Vietnam, supporting the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and backing the Palestinians in their just anti-imperialist struggle for a state.

However the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a confused realignment of international politics. The USSR was a Russian-dominated state founded upon the subordination of the former empire's peripheral nations (Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia etc) and the cancelling of the self-determination they had gained in 1918 following the anti-Tsarist revolutions in 1917. But the nostalgic propaganda leftism of many radical socialists unfortunately still eulogises the politics of leaders of "Russian" communism (Lenin and Trotsky or even Lenin and Stalin) in ways that prevent them from making a concrete analysis of the very different concrete international situation today. The nostalgic wants to "end the war" with Russian boots still on Ukrainian ground and without supporting Ukrainian resistance.

Our world of increasing inter-imperialist rivalry between the US/ EU; Russia and China is not a very safe place. The increasing danger of 2024 producing further victories for far-right parties in elections across Europe, or of a return of Donald Trump to the US presidency - coincides with the rise of authoritarian powers and leaders internationally, using new technology to clamp down on democratic freedoms and using their tanks, air forces and missiles to crush democratic revolutions like that in Ukraine or Syria. This is the dangerous world we live in.

The overwhelming majority of Scots back Ukraine's fight for freedom, democracy and independence. It's no contradiction to say "I back Palestine - and I back Ukraine". Both struggles are of peoples fighting against a neighbouring more powerful militarised state, seeking to subjugate, intimidate and attack civilian populations with impunity and eliminate their national existence.

Ukrainians have spent hundreds of years fighting against Russian imperialism, just as the Irish spent fighting against Anglo-Scottish rule. Despite the evident mistakes 20th-century Russian social democrats made in dealing with the national liberation of Russia's dominions and the system they established which Stalin exploited to become one of history's biggest butchers as he starved the peasant population to death in a genocide of the Ukrainian people called the Holodomor, too many on the UK left perpetuate the myth of Russian anti-imperialism which fits with Putin's phoney fascist historical narrative. That's why the new MP for Rochdale - so beloved of Putin's RT TV propaganda channel - who was elected to be a voice for Palestine will probably not be using that voice for Ukraine's oppressed people.

Some of us in the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland (of which I am proud to be a founder member) have done our best to make contacts between Scotland's Ukrainian and Palestinian refugee communities. USCS amplifies the messages of solidarity of the Ukrainian left (represented by magazine Spilne, and by independent trade unions the KPVU) who express an anti-neoliberal viewpoint on Ukraine's fight for freedom and independence. They unequivocally support the Palestinians in a country that is one of a small handful of European states that actually recognises the State of Palestine, and has done so since as far back as 2001.

Whilst the lives of Muslims and Christian Palestinians are precious and rightly matter to progressives across the globe, so should those of Uyghur Muslims facing genocide in China, those of Crimean Tatars once again expelled from their homeland by Russian tanks and those of the Yemeni people suffering multiple invasions. The bombing of Yemen by the neighbouring Muslim theocratic dictatorships of the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Iran hypocritically spending billions destroying Yemeni society using British, American and Iranian military supplies whilst crying crocodile tears for Palestinians who they've failed to assist in all these decades of Israeli occupation. These "anti-imperialist" regimes are not our friends.

Finally, a word about Africa and Africans. It's galling to see West Africans long rightly angered by France's continuing imperialist interference in their countries (in the form of the CFA franc headquarters in Paris and run by French bankers) wave Russian flags and set up "Wagner" churches eulogising dead mercenary Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose troops committed the worst atrocities in Bakhmut, Bucha, Irpin and Mariupol in Ukraine. Wagner followed this pattern in the African conflicts they've been sent out to in support of newly emboldened military dictatorships in Cote D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali. Just ask any other Africans who've experienced military dictatorships whether that advances the health and wellbeing of their people. Russia and China only want African nations for their mineral wealth and natural resources. They are imperialists just like the Americans and Europeans. Putin and Xi Jinping merely use rhetoric of anti-Western imperialism to mask their own clearly imperialist expansionist desires. Quite simply they are not, and never will be Africa's friends.

Consistent anti-imperialism means to back the ordinary peoples of Ukraine, Palestine, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, the Uyghurs and DR Congo and campaigning to get imperialist interfering hands off their countries. Whether it's Russian imperialism in Ukraine and Georgia, Chinese imperialism in Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang or British, US and European imperialism in the Middle East and Africa, always the progressive left needs to be on the side of the oppressed - not a fig leaf for oppressive authoritarian regimes, East or West, Global North or Global South.

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P.S.

The National. This article was published as part of the SNP BAME group's weekly column.