

# A Draft Action Programme for Ukraine

International Secretariat, League for the Fifth International Thu, 31/07/2014 - 11:17

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The League for the Fifth International participated in the Resistance Conference held in Crimea on July 6th/7th. The conference provided an opportunity for those opposed not only to the Kiev government's war to impose its regime on the South and East of the country but also to the separatism that is often portrayed as the goal of those fighting Kiev, to discuss how to advance the struggle for socialism in the present conflict. As many speakers at the conference emphasised, this is not an issue that can be resolved at a single conference and nor is it only a concern of Ukrainian socialists but of revolutionaries everywhere. In the same spirit of internationalism, the International Secretariat of the League wishes to contribute to the ongoing discussion by presenting its own estimation of what should be the political basis for independent working class struggle and a new workers' party. Of course, we recognise the inevitable limitations on us in this project but we reject any suggestion that this is an obstacle to international collaboration. The alternative would be silence and, against a background of war, that would be not only cowardly but a dereliction of internationalist duty.

## Preamble

Ukraine is wracked by a bloody and aggressive civil war waged by a president and a government with not a shred of democratic legitimacy yet backed to the hilt by the ?democracies? of North America and Western Europe. Pogroms and massacres in Odessa, Mariupol, Slavyansk go without condemnation. A genocidal attack on Donetsk is being prepared.

The involvement of Nato and the CIA in aiding and directing the putschists in Kiev must be exposed and with it the fairytales of the ?democratic Maidan?. The fruits of Euromaidan could be seen in the House of the Trade Unions in Odessa; a savage pogrom.

The workers of Donbas, the volunteer militias, who are heroically resisting the offensive on their homes are referred to as terrorists, separatists and Russian agents. Their crime is to refuse to recognise the legitimacy of the 20-22 February putsch and the bogus 25 May presidential election and to resist the imposition of this regime in the south and east of the country.

Their victory would be a victory for all ordinary Ukrainians. They deserve the maximum support, physical as well as moral, from the working class in western Ukraine and from progressive forces around the world. By contrast, their defeat would mean the imposition of the European Union?s savage austerity programme, the closure of whole industries and privatisation of what remains. It would be a defeat for workers in every part of the country.

Within Ukraine, the putschist government acts in the interests of the fabulously wealthy capitalists, Akhmetov, Firtash, Timoshenko, Poroshenko, Kolomoysky etc. whose rule today is even more naked than it was before the bogus Maidan revolution that some dupes still claim was against corruption and the rule of oligarchs. Beyond that, however, Ukraine is in the frontline of a new Cold War, that could become a hot

one if Washington continues with its present course of repeated provocations designed by the Neocons. In this deadly chess game, Poroshenko, Yatsenyuk and company are merely pawns.

Workers and youth, antifascists and anti-imperialists should do all in their power to block and hinder the 'aid with strings' proffered by the IMF and the billionaire bondholders of Wall Street, Frankfurt, and the City of London to Poroshenko, Yatsenyuk, and Tyahnybok. These criminals head a regime of oligarchs, neoliberals and fascists, the first internationally recognised government with Neo-Nazis in it since the second world war.

The cynical pretence that this regime is defending the national integrity and independence of Ukraine is the exact opposite of the truth. They have done more to surrender its independence than any previous government since 1991. They have driven a huge wedge between the speakers of Ukrainian and Russian and the minority languages.

They have threatened them with slaughter and displacement and have set out to do it, driving tens, if not hundreds, of thousands from their ravaged homes. These people are, indeed, the rightful heirs of their hero Stepan Bandera and the Nazi auxiliaries, the SS Galicia Division, whose banners, symbols and slogans they openly flaunt.

Those who truly represent the interests of the ordinary working people of Ukraine, east and west, are fighting with the antifascist resistance as their grandfathers fought in the antifascist partisans and the red army.

The volunteers who have come across the border are fighting in a progressive cause, but the Great Russian Nationalist and pan-Slav ideas that many of them hold, their expressed view that Ukraine does not, or should not, exist, are reactionary and can only harm that cause. Likewise, although anyone fighting a civil war against a reactionary government supported by the greatest imperialist power in history undoubtedly has the right and duty to take arms and logistical support from that imperialism's rival if they can, it is essential that they avoid becoming the puppets of that rival.

To win, the fighters in the east and south need to reach out to the population behind the National Guard and the Right Sector killers. To the workers, youth, and soldiers of the rest of the country, they need to say, like the miners of Donetsk, 'We have taken up arms in self-defence and in defence of your jobs and livelihoods, your freedoms and liberties as well as our own. We are not separatists. All we want to separate ourselves from is the terror of fascists in the uniform of the Ukrainian state.

'On the contrary we want to unite all ordinary Ukrainians, starting with those whose labour has built up the country over generations. If they suppress us, close our mines, factories and offices, our hospitals, nurseries and schools today, they will close yours tomorrow. And if the workers of the east and the south have been ground under the fascist jackboot, where will you turn to for support then?'

#### Ukraine's revolutionary crisis

The global recession that began in 2008 threw the Ukrainian economy into a deep crisis. Bled white by parasitic Ukrainian oligarchs who channelled their wealth out of the country, it survived only with financial support from Russia and, to a lesser degree, from the IMF and World Bank. But such 'gifts' come at a high price. The national debt increased dramatically, and with that came the permanent problem of making payments to meet the conditions of the IMF. In 2009 alone, economic output decreased by 18 per cent. Industry collapsed and the hryvnia, was massively devalued. Workers faced non-payment of their wages both in private and in government sectors.

Nor is it only the working class who are living in deplorable conditions. In the west of the country, the individual peasant farms provide little more than subsistence. As a result, levels of poverty are even higher, and average incomes much lower, in western Ukraine than in the more industrialised East.

After a brief recovery in 2013, the Ukraine economy fell back into recession once again. This, and the external pressure from the rival imperialists, the USA-EU and Russia, led to a pre-revolutionary situation and to sharp divisions amongst the Ukrainian oligarchs. Whose 'rescue plan' should they accept; the EU-IMF's or Russia's?

Since the restoration of capitalism in the 1990s, Ukraine has occupied a subordinate position in the global capitalist division of labour: it is a semi-colony, apparently politically independent but in reality subject to the dictates of the rival big capitals of the US-EU and Russia.

Internally, just like Russia, Ukraine fell under the domination of a few big capitalists, the "oligarchs". They grabbed the former state owned industries, built huge economic empires and advanced their interests through the main political parties, a "Western" bloc controlling the Fatherland Party and Udar and an 'Eastern bloc' the "Party of the Regions".

In this situation, Ukrainian "big business" inevitably has a "mafia-like" nature; systematic nepotism is the only road to riches. Widespread corruption in the state administration and the bureaucracy is the result, not the cause, of the only possible form of capitalism for such a country.

The politicians of the Fatherland Party and Udar peddle the illusion that ever closer integration into 'the West' will bring prosperity similar to Poland and the Baltic states and make it possible for young people with skills to find jobs in the west. The alternative illusion is that further integration of the East's industries with Russia and joining its customs union, with the prospect of developing economic ties with China, will save jobs and avoid a fate like that of Greece or Romania.

Domination by the EU-US-IMF, or by Russia, would only entrench Ukraine's semi-colonial status. Real independence could only come from expropriating the oligarchs and breaking the chains they have forged with both EU-US and Russia. This does not mean breaking with the working people of Russia or the European Union, quite the opposite. It means uniting against our common enemies.

## Geopolitics

Throughout the whole development of the Euromaidan pseudo-revolution, the fascist-led putsch and the subsequent civil war, the United States has taken the lead in promoting outrages and reaction. Its motive is to establish its domination of Ukraine, to exclude Russian influence, to stymie the development of economic ties with Germany and the EU and to continue its encirclement of Russia with Nato forces.

This Nato Enlargement Project has been US policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Reneging on a promise made to the Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1990, that it would not move 'one inch to the East', Nato has, in effect, militarily occupied Eastern Europe. A Nato Membership Action Plan is Washington's gift to Kiev. In August, 2014, 'Operation Rapid Trident' will put American and British troops on Ukraine's Russian border and 'Operation Sea Breeze' will deploy US warships within sight of Russian ports. Imagine if these acts of provocation were carried out on America's borders or off its coasts!

Tied to this is western finance capital's plan to use the IMF's 'shock therapy' to disrupt Russian-Ukrainian trade and to flood Ukraine with European commodities while gaining greater access to cheap Ukrainian labour. German capital is caught in a vice by this US plan because it needs to find new export markets and opportunities for profitable investment. Its own plans include strengthening existing economic

links with Russia and developing those with China. Thus, America's blows to isolate and blockade Russia are also disguised blows against Germany, its hegemony over the EU and its plans to penetrate Asia.

At the same time, the Russian Federation of Vladimir Putin clearly also has imperialist interests in Ukraine and agents who more or less consciously represent them. The Russian state has given logistical support to the resistance but it is not willing to defy the much more economically and militarily powerful western imperialists. Even if it did so, a Russian annexation of eastern and southern Ukraine, or support for an independent 'Novorosiya', would not be a progressive solution for the workers of these regions. It would mean exploitation by the Russian oligarchs and their state and oppression by Putin's highly authoritarian regime.

The true allies in Russia of Ukrainian workers are those fighting to oust the Putin dictatorship and establish democratic freedoms, workers power and socialism. A federation of states of the whole Russian/Ukrainian region must be based on genuine self-determination of its peoples and thus first and foremost of its workers, not of its oligarchs, bureaucrats or secret services.

This aggressive pursuit of fresh goals for investment, fresh sources of raw materials and energy, and fresh markets carries, as the twentieth century showed, the enormous risk of war between the major powers. Ukraine suffered unimaginably in both world wars. Now it finds itself a field of contention between two blocks.

The imperialist great powers, with the USA taking the lead, have deliberately fanned the flames of civil war in Ukraine. Why? Because capitalists, desperate to escape the recession and stagnation which still blights Europe, America and Russia, see opening up Eurasia, while at the same time blocking the plans of their rivals, as the only way out.

That many democrats, socialists and even 'revolutionaries' in the West excuse, or cover this up, is testimony to the severity of the political crisis engendered by the eruption of a new period of inter-imperialist rivalry and the way the media have rallied large sections of the intelligentsia and the middle strata to the side of 'their own' democratic imperialisms. Russia and China, because of their authoritarian and dictatorial régimes, are cast as the main enemy.

The crimes of the rulers of these new imperialist powers, for example, in Chechnya and Tibet, as well as their denial of the democratic rights of their own citizens, are real enough. But the role of human rights prosecutor ill becomes the perpetrators of 'shock and awe' in Afghanistan, the 10 year blockade and two wars in Iraq, the atrocities of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay; not forgetting the prime backers of Israel's genocidal attacks on Gaza.

The true allies of the working people of Ukraine are those who face and fight imperialism and its agents around the world and who in the USA, the EU, and in Russia and China, proclaim the main enemy is at home and set out to expose and block their rulers' plans for world domination.

#### From civil war to class war

All hope of building a country that is based on a free, equal and democratic association of different peoples and languages rests on the Ukrainian working class's ability to unite and to defeat the nationalist barbarism of its ruling class and their fascist allies.

Though many in the East will have been alienated from the Ukrainian state by the violence of the onslaught of the fascists and the nationalist government, so, too, many in the west will be alienated by 'their'

government's senseless waste of life in sending conscripts to fight their brothers and sisters in the East. The protests of mothers of conscripts, and the refusals to serve or to fire on civilians, show that, even without a significant political lead, large numbers in the west of the country disapprove strongly of this unprovoked civil war. Sooner or later they will turn on its perpetrators. The task is to make it sooner.

The illusions in the European Union, which were widespread in 2013, will rapidly erode once the terms of the Association Agreement become decisions of the government and when it becomes clear that the EU is going to open neither its gates nor its purse.

As it becomes clear that both Brussels and Moscow are far more interested in the exploitation of the Ukrainian people than in defending democracy or improving their livelihoods, the objective conditions for united action, east and west, in defence and improvement of employment and social demands, will re-emerge.

At present, it is the armed working class and youth of the Donbas who are leading the struggle, but they cannot win on their own. While they have achieved remarkable tactical victories, to inflict a strategic defeat on the government, in other words, to overthrow it, they need to mobilise the workers of central and west Ukraine.

This could clearly never be achieved under separatist slogans or under the leadership of those who have taken over in the 'republics', whose statements have denied the existence of Ukraine as a nation, advocated Pan-Slavism and an Orthodox state and supported reactionary positions on gay rights etc. These ideas must be combatted within the resistance movement. Ukrainian fascism is not the only kind, as the history of the Black Hundreds demonstrated. Russian fascism in power would be as mortal a danger to the working class as the Right Sector and Svoboda already are in the West.

On the contrary, successful working class mobilisation across Ukraine requires a programme for class action and a party that is free of the oligarchs and the bureaucrats, free of the poison of nationalism, Russian or Ukrainian, a party such as Ukraine's workers and peasants built in the days of the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and the civil war of 1918-21.

It must be a democratic party of militant fighters, recognised as their leaders by the mass of the workers of city and countryside. A party such as Lenin built, not a party of privileged bureaucrats with no internal debate and discussion. Such parties do not make revolutions and, as 1991 showed, in the end they cannot even defend past gains either.

It must also be but one section of an international party that mobilises globally against the exploiters of the world, resisting the rival imperialists dragging the masses into their thieves' quarrels, according to the old principles; the workers have no fatherland, workers and oppressed peoples of the world, unite!

A programme of action

Such a party's programme must start from the demand for an end to the siege of Donetsk and the other towns still resisting Kiev's offensive and the enforced withdrawal of the National Guard, the Right Sector, oligarch Ihor Kolomoysky's Dnipro Battalion and all the other fascist gangs, from the cities, towns and villages of the East and the South.

They need to be driven out, disarmed and dissolved. Those guilty of atrocities must be arrested by an armed workers' and popular militia, and normal life for the people must be restored. All police special forces and the secret services must be disbanded.

In the early days of the resistance to Kiev, local administration was taken over by self-appointed

committees representing the resistance forces. These ad hoc organisations must now give way to new and permanent bodies. Every town and city should be run by councils of delegates, elected in every workplace and district and recallable by their electors. Under their protection, all the refugees can return and a programme of restoring the wrecked houses, schools, hospitals and workplaces can be implemented.

High on the list of priorities is the call to tear up the Maidan regime's disastrous agreements with the EU, whose effects; privatisation, mass unemployment and social destruction, are becoming ever clearer. We should also reject as a false alternative Putin's Eurasian Economic Union, the plan for a "powerful, supra-national union" on the model of the European Union. Instead, we demand cancellation of the external debts to the IMF, the EU and Russia! Without that, no escape from the dependence and backwardness of the country is possible.

Ukraine's workers should reject both the EU and Russia as imperialist blocks with enormous potential for war and instead fight for a United Socialist States of Europe and the world. Therefore, we should reject absolutely all plans to join Nato and the invitation for it to conduct manoeuvres on Ukrainian soil or in its territorial waters.

Once all fascist repression and oligarchic bribery and corruption of the electoral process has been ended, we need free and fair elections to a democratic and sovereign Constituent Assembly. It needs to address all Ukraine's national, ethnic and language questions and guarantee equality in the use of all languages in state business, education, the media etc.

For freedom of assembly, demonstrations, the press and the trade unions. The unions must be freed from control by oligarchs, bosses and bureaucrats and represent their own rank and file members democratically. For a working class women's movement to fight for full equality and the progressive removal of the burden of domestic labour on women through the development of childcare and other facilities. Homophobia has been used on both sides and is a force of reaction. We stand for the right to hold Gay Pride marches, defended against harassment and for the right of state recognised marriage for all, regardless of sex or gender.

All secret agreements and connections between Yanukovich, Yatsenyuk, Poroshenko and the EU and Russia, must be exposed. We demand the opening of the files on all the financial connections between government and the various oligarchs and their imperialist masters to the workers' councils and their appointed representatives!

We demand the expropriation without compensation of the oligarchs and the confiscation of their private wealth! For an international working class campaign to return the wealth stolen from Ukraine by the oligarchs! Expropriation of Ukrainian and foreign large enterprises and banks! Development and restructuring of these companies under workers' control and according to the needs of the Ukrainian workers and peasant masses! Elaboration of an emergency plan based on those needs!

We demand a steeply progressive taxation of wealth and high incomes!

We fight for the expropriation of large farms and agro-industry under workers' control and for grants for small farmers to increase their productivity, and to encourage the formation of cooperatives.

For a programme of socially useful public works to give jobs and wages to the unemployed and precarious workers! For a statutory minimum wage and minimum pension of 300 euros per month, protected against inflation by a workers' cost of living index!

For the creation of a state monopoly of foreign trade! The labour movement in the EU and Russia must

demand that economic relations be regulated on the basis of equality and that all restrictions on the free movement, and all discrimination against Ukrainians in the labour market, must be removed!

Like the soviets of 1917, democratically elected workers' councils will be not only the organisers of the struggle to overthrow the old regime but also the fundamental basis of a new, revolutionary state, a workers' state. As the territory under revolutionary control expands, these councils will be coordinated and centralised on a delegate basis at district, provincial and eventually national level, forming the basis of a new central government, a workers' and peasants' government. This democratic structure will totally replace the existing corrupt state apparatus, crush the forces of counter-revolution and introduce nationwide workers' control and a democratic planned economy.

Such a programme and the struggle for it cannot be limited to Ukraine. It must act as the initiator of a pan-European revolution, the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe in common class struggle with the workers in the EU and in Russia.

This is the only way that the permanent decline of our country, a result of the dependence on imperialist powers as well as the plundering of the oligarchs, can be stopped and a workers' socialist Ukraine built.

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