



Solidarity with the Russian anti-war movement!

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Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there have been protests around the world - including in Russia itself. This article is dedicated to them.

The activists themselves have been facing massive repression from the Russian state since the first day of the war. They face prison sentences of up to 15 years and fines of up to 5 million roubles (about 50,000 euros at the current exchange rate).

There have also been occasional house searches and cases of torture, such as that of the Bashkir environmental activist Aytugan Sharipov. He was subjected to hours of electric shocks for sending anti-war messages on WhatsApp. Moreover, the massive number of arrests speaks for itself. According to German press reports, around 14,000 people have been arrested since the beginning of the invasion until 13 March. Often these end up in 10 - 15 days of "administrative detention".

The harshness becomes clear if one takes a closer look at the arrests only from the day of action on 6 March. In Moscow about 2,500 people demonstrated, in St. Petersburg 1,500. 1,700 were arrested in Moscow for taking part in an "unauthorised demonstration", in St. Petersburg 750. So, about half to two thirds of those who dared to take to the streets. Another major problem is the information blockade itself. Almost all independent as well as many Western media and social networks are blocked or closed, while state agencies spread disinformation about the "special military operation".

An overview

In immediate response to the invasion, there have been several petitions and position statements by well-known members of the Russian public against the war. More than 30,000 technicians, 6,000 doctors, 3,400 architects, more than 4,300 teachers, over 17,000 artists, 5,000 scientists and 2,000 actors, directors and other creative people signed open letters calling on Putin's government to end the war.

Several supporters of the petitions against the invasion lost their jobs. This was followed by actions by artists such as the Nevoina collective from Samara. They organised an action called "A Word to the Dead". The activists put on black sacks and formed a line of their bodies on the ice of the Volga to symbolise the victims of the war. Other forms of protest are shown by the anonymous movement "Sick Leave Against the War". In addition, there are many guerrilla actions and "silent vigils" as an alternative to street protests.

However, the highlight of the protests so far are the two central days of action against the war on 6 and 13 March.

Women and youth forward!

Present at the protests was the "Feminist Resistance to War". One of the founders stated that anti-militarism is an integral part of feminism because it opposes all forms of violence, including military aggression. In the context of the protests, the network focuses mainly on overcoming the information blockade, for example through viral WhatsApp messages or guerrilla street actions.

The youth movement Vesna should also be mentioned. It is part of the European Liberal Youth and has called for both days of action, where it clearly stated that Putin is not only waging war against Ukraine, but also against his own

people. It has called for the next day of action on 2 April.

The initiative "Students against the War" is much smaller. On 18 March, they called for action at Russian universities on their Telegram channel (3,100 followers) after they tried to hold educational strikes there between 9 and 12 March. They called for contacting lecturers who are against the war and raising the issue in seminars, leaving leaflets and inscriptions against the information blockade and helping students who are threatened with de-registration. Furthermore, university rectors should be asked to withdraw their signatures on letters of support for the war.

The Russian Left

The Communist Party of Russia CPRF (with 43 seats the second largest party in the State Duma after Putin's United Russia - 334 seats) is to be understood as "loyal to the Kremlin" and subordinates itself to Russian imperialism. Nevertheless, there is a movement against its leadership. Thus, the initiative "KPRF/KOMSOMOL members against the war" was formed with support from several deputies of the State Duma to campaign for the end of the war. In addition, there is a letter from 462 members of the CPRF calling for "the immediate end of the fratricidal war between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine" and a programme for the transformation of Russia and the world after the war. This is to be discussed at all levels of the party. Equally positive is that Russia's war is clearly described as imperialist.

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), with more than 27 million members, is in turn strongly involved in Putinism. It is not a partner against the war under its bureaucratic leadership. The latter stands firmly behind the Russian invasion, although a leadership must not be confused with the rank and file.

However, the situation is different with the KTR, the Confederation of Labour of Russia. The confederation of some 20 trade unions has 2 million members. One of the affiliated unions is MPRA, which is a militant organisation active in the transnational car industry (Ford, VW, BENTELER). Since its foundation in 2006, it has fought for its place through militant strikes. Its leaders are repeatedly exposed to repression and some of them hold socialist positions. On 26 February, the KTR issued a statement which, while not an open rejection of the war, called for a "cessation of military action as soon as possible and the resumption of peaceful dialogue and coexistence between the multinational peoples of Russia and Ukraine".

Challenges

The protests against the war run across a broad spectrum. There have been petitions, guerrilla actions as well as mobilisation days. In addition, the silent protest of thousands of people who are now leaving Russia should not be underestimated. However, the diffuse and largely isolated character of the resistance is related to a weakness of the left in Russia itself.

The immediate biggest problem for everyone on the street is the massive and omnipresent repressive apparatus of the Putin regime. There is a lack of structures that could combine illegal work with the use of the narrowly limited legal possibilities in this situation.

Furthermore, the radical left has no deep roots in the working class. The latter is organised and controlled en masse mainly in the state-supporting trade union federation. The current protests can thus correctly be directed against Russia's war, but beyond that, in their current form, they can only represent the germinal form of a broad anti-war movement. They are far from being able to stop the war, the left is marginalised, the working class does not appear as an independent force.

Accordingly, the rather autonomous group "Alt-Left" assumes in its evaluation of a day of action that the leadership of the movement has a liberal character and that there is majority support among the population for the Crimean operation and a strong increase in nationalism. Of course, this is partly a result of Putin's propaganda supremacy, but it also stems from the depth of the historical defeat that accompanied the restoration of capitalism, and the impact of the collapse of Stalinism on the left itself, which has not yet been able to reorganise itself and the working class to be an alternative social pole against Putin.

Tasks

Revolutionaries and anti-war activists in Russia face two major challenges:

- They have to develop programmatic clarity about the imperialist character of Russia and the war. The war is not simply a "fratricidal war", but one that aims to subjugate Ukraine to Russia. It is also an inter-imperialist conflict and a precursor to direct war against NATO, the USA and the EU.

From this derives the position not simply to stand up for a false (because imperialist) peace, but to openly oppose Russian imperialism and its war aims. In Russia, the struggle against the war must be linked with the struggle to overthrow the Putin regime and Russian capitalism.

It is necessary to combine democratic demands with socialist demands: Withdrawal of the troops, down with Putin, against passing on the costs of the war and the sanctions to the masses, democratic control over production and distribution of goods, expropriation of enterprises, for the strike and sabotage of the war, anti-militarist work and agitation in the army.

Of course, the struggle for the recognition of Ukraine's right to self-determination must also be part of the programme. Russian history itself after the October Revolution of 1917 shows that this is not a wild dream.

- The organisation and combination of illegal and legal work (creating structures for protection from the state and for illegal publication and agitation, creating channels for open discussion, exploiting legality, ...) is interrelated with programmatic clarification.

Clarifying the position and creating organisational structures becomes all the more important when the movement against the war spreads spontaneously and of its own accord (e.g. in strikes against the worsening living situation). Only in this way can it be directed politically and steered in a revolutionary direction.

Finally, the struggle against the war is not a task for the Russian working class alone. The left in Germany must show solidarity with the existing protests and at the same time fight the policy of the state towards Russia. It is essential for the struggle in Russia that we fight against armaments and sanctions here. In this way we can show the Russian people that the international working class is their ally and shares their interests. In this way, we can also contribute to removing the ground from Putin's Great Russian nationalist propaganda and thus his support.

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