

No to the Russian invasion of Ukraine! Self-determination for Ukraine! Solidarity with Ukrainian resistance and the Russian anti-war protesters!

by Joseph Green, Detroit Workers' Voice (excerpts)

After years of intervening in Ukraine, the Russian government has now launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This is a war of choice for the Russian government. It wasn't forced on Russia, but Putin wanted it in order to bring Ukraine to its knees. This war not only means suffering for the Ukrainian people, but it increases the danger of other wars throughout Europe. Already Putin and Russian officials are threatening military action, even nuclear war, against countries that interfere with the Russian invasion.

Russia, as well as the rest of the world, faces great dangers in the coming years, but invasion from Ukraine or elsewhere in Europe was not one of them. Putin prefers to dream of territorial expansion than to deal with the growing environmental crisis or to accept internal democratization. He prefers to rely on fossil fuel production to fund new military adventures than to wean the Russian economy off fossil fuel or to allow the working masses a real say in Russian policy.

The background to Putin's war on Ukraine

As the USSR dissolved in 1991, a number of its constituent republics voted to become independent states. They exercised the right to self-determination. Ukraine was one of them, and every section of Ukraine voted in favor of independence.

Good relations might have been maintained between Russia and the newly-independent states, but first Yeltsin and then Putin used military action against some of them in order to restore Russian control over them. These actions have poisoned relations with these countries, and they have also helped erode the rights of the Russian people as well. There were two vicious wars to suppress the Chechen people, who wanted to be included among the republics given the right to exercise self-determination. There were military actions in Georgia and Moldova, and in 2014 Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine and also intervened in the Donbas. The current invasion of Ukraine is a continuation of this ongoing policy of Russian expansionism.

In preparing for this military adventure, Putin orchestrated a hate campaign against Ukraine and Ukrainians. This led up to Putin even declaring that Ukraine isn't a real country. On this pretext, he

didn't bother to declare war on Ukraine, but described the invasion as just a special military action. This denigrates the centuries of history of Ukrainian life and struggle. Moreover, even as a constituent republic of the USSR it had been a founding member of the UN, with its own seat in the General Assembly since 1945.

The Ukrainian people stand up to defend their independence

But it isn't proving as easy to destroy the national existence of a country as Putin had believed. Ukrainian resistance has been stubborn, and the attempted Russian blitzkrieg has already turned into a protracted struggle.

The Russian army has an overwhelming superiority in size and weapons against Ukraine, and it has invaded Ukraine from the North, East, and South. As one can see, it is not Russia, but Ukraine that has been surrounded with hostile troops. These troops have struck at Ukraine from the land, sea, and air, and they expected to occupy the capital Kyiv and other major cities rapidly, perhaps on the first day.

But the Ukrainian army hasn't fallen apart, and the Ukrainian people didn't panic and scatter. The Russian army faced stiff resistance, and key positions have often changed hands several times. Not just the Ukrainian armed forces are fighting, but arms are being distributed to the general population as well. This reflects the determination of the people to defend their national existence.

Meanwhile the invading forces have faced the problem of low morale among many soldiers, bad planning that has led to motorized units running out of fuel, and repeated setbacks. No doubt the Russian army will reorganize, and it has been throwing more and more troops into the battle. Cities will fall, and Ukrainians will be faced with a long, difficult struggle. But the Ukrainian resistance has already changed the political situation, encouraged the anti-war forces, exposed the lies about Ukraine being a failed country, and raised the image of Ukraine in the international arena.

Anti-war demonstrations throughout Russia

On the first day of the invasion, anti-war demonstrations broke out throughout Russia; they have taken place in 60 or more cities, and there have been over 4,000 arrests of demonstrators. Despite

repression, the weeks of “hate Ukraine” propaganda, the threat of being labeled traitors or terrorists, and the government’s efforts to hide the truth about what was going on in Ukraine, protesters bravely stood up to denounce the war and show that the Russian people don’t want to fight the Ukrainian people, with whom many Russians have close relations. This shows that Putin’s policies do not reflect the real “Russian world”, but only the will of Putin and the Russian ruling class. It is one of the most promising developments and shows something of the potential for unity between the working people of Russia and Ukraine.

The website “Countervortex” describes the first protests as follows:

“Thousands of people have taken to the streets of cities across Russia in open protest of Putin’s invasion of Ukraine—from Kaliningrad in the west to Vladivostok in the east. What began as isolated ‘solo pickets’—essentially the only legal form of public protest in Russia—quickly snowballed into mass unpermitted marches and rallies. The largest demonstrations were reported from Moscow and St Petersburg, where they were met with riot police in full body armor. In Moscow, Red Square was closed off by military vehicles, preventing protesters from marching on the seat of government power. Independent monitoring group OVD-Info (<https://ovdinfo.org/>) counted some 1,800 protesters arrested by security forces in some 60 cities, including Tyumen, Kazan, Rostov-on-Don, Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk and Yekaterinburg. Popular slogans include ‘No to war’ and ‘Hands off Ukraine.’ Many demonstrators were heard to shout ‘Arrest Putin, not me!’ as they were dragged away by police. (Euronews, Moscow Times, Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, The Guardian, LBC, CBC, NYT, OVD-Info, OVD-Info)”

Anti-war demonstrations around the world

Protests have also taken place in a number of cities around the world, such as Bologna, Italy; Munich Germany; Wenceslaus Square, Prague; Tbilisi, Georgia; and New York City.

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It’s notable that the invasion was also denounced in Myanmar. The people there are involved in a harsh, bitter struggle against the military regime that took power in a coup last February, with demonstrations in cities having been drowned in blood while armed resistance to the military has flared throughout the countryside. In this situation, the military butchers support the invasion of Ukraine, while the democratic forces — both the National Unity Government in exile and the insurgent fighters — have denounced Putin’s war on Ukraine.

Meanwhile the African Union, which contains 55 member countries, has denounced the invasion of Ukraine. But the military regime in Sudan, which seized power last October 25 and has been shooting down demonstrators ever since, see things differently. Number two murderer Mohamed “Hemeti” Dagalo, the Deputy Head of the regime, visited Moscow to appeal for more weapons and aid,

and while there he endorsed the invasion.

Imperialist spheres of influence

Putin wants to make the issue of Ukraine into one of the Russian sphere of influence versus the Western sphere of influence; he wants a redivision of Europe. He claims that Bush and Gorbachev agreed privately to such a division in 1990, but the terms weren’t followed. But whether there was such a secret agreement or not, this would be the politics of two big powers carving up Europe.

Indeed, it is notable that Putin’s demands against Ukraine include demands for changes throughout Europe, and they call for agreement from the US, NATO, and other countries. He is invading Ukraine, but he is issuing threats, even nuclear threats, against any country which won’t fall in line with his plans. And there isn’t even the pretext of treating Ukraine as an equal.

Ukraine isn’t simply an extension of this or that big power, but is a country in its own right. Over the years, it has sought relations with both Russia and the EU, but it is not simply an extension of either. It has a bourgeois government and economy, but so does Russia; indeed, Ukraine suffers from rich oligarchs which have been connected to the Russian oligarchs. In its resistance to the Russian invasion, it is obtaining arms from the US and EU, but it doesn’t really have a choice for where else to get them. Russia itself used a massive amount of American aid in World War 2, and Putin’s current demand is that the US and NATO should collaborate with him in imposing the redivision of Europe that Putin wants.

The right to self-determination isn’t socialism. Ukraine does not have a revolutionary government, but a bourgeois government pursuing neoliberal reforms promoted by the EU. While Ukraine is more democratic than it was when it first left the USSR, it still is only partially democratic, although certainly more so than Russia. Indeed, Russia has intervened to slander and opposed each major attempt at a step forward by the Ukrainian people. And the separation off of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk from Ukraine by Russian intervention has cast a major pall on Ukrainian politics. This is one of the reasons why the right to self-determination is important for the working masses of Ukraine, including many socialist Ukrainians whose ultimate goal goes beyond independence. The return of Ukraine to Russian domination would set back the mass struggle in Ukraine for years. <>

* For statements of an Australian activist and Russian feminists, see the full article at <http://communistvoice.org/DSWV-220228.html>

* For a statement from an Iranian American who describes herself as a socialist feminist, see <https://iranianprogressives.org/putins-war-on-ukraine-syria-the-me-too-movement/>

* Read *Communist Voice* at communistvoice.org

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