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FROM UKRAINE TO GAZA, STOP THE WAR!

ABSTRACT

Since the 19th century, the workers' movement has often been the main social force committed to preventing imperialist wars where younger workers would be called to shed their blood and elder workers would be forced to work and starve. Since the Russian invasion and the outbreak of the Ukraine war, the urgent need for this commitment is back. At the first stages of that war, we, as members of the workers' committee of the Portuguese public media network RTP, issued a statement as our own contribution to this task.¹ The following article is an explanation and updating of the reasons for that statement.

¹ The statement was translated into Spanish and can be read at <https://www.herramienta.com.ar/confesion-de-campismo>.

KEYWORDS

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Nothing at all can justify an invasion like Russia's into the Ukraine. Nothing that has happened in these past two years has changed the criminal features of the invasion. Nothing in the meantime has made the anti-war protests in Russia any less valuable and right. Putin's crimes, like the murder of Alexei Navalny, always tolerated by Western governments as long as they were convenient, have no reason to be tolerated now by the international workers' movement.

But no Russian invasion can be used as an excuse to divert from the Israeli genocide in Gaza, to expand NATO to encompass formerly neutral countries, to increase military spending in NATO countries, to prepare major wars against Russia and even China, or to wage a war against the democratic rights and living standards of the working class in the West. This is all being done and this is the main problem we have to deal with.

HOW NATO WARMONGERING STIFLES PRESS FREEDOM

While the truth has always been an early victim of all wars, since the outbreak of the Ukraine war it is getting wiped away from the sight of the Western public even more than ever before. Ancient techniques such as selecting suitable subjects and silencing everything else are now combined with sophisticated new techniques such as "deep fakes" and targeting each individual's soft spots through "big data". In this regard, Western propaganda, often under a false Ukrainian flag, has been much more effective than Russia's.

Besides spreading better fabricated lies, the Western democracies resort to massive censorship, like that imposed on "Russia Today", in order to stifle anything – lies or truths – that might come from the East. Censorship does not shy away from even murder in slow motion. A broad and year-long conspiracy involving Swedish, British and US "independent" judiciaries tried to make out of Julian Assange a Western Navalny. This was designed to make a chilling example for the world of the life sentence awaiting him in the US, and was only stopped by worldwide protests. Press freedom ends where exposing imperialist war crimes starts. Censorship and judicial murder coalesce, as under McCarthyism, to make this crystal clear, precisely when war crimes are becoming fashionable again.

However, the result of these authoritarian features is, rather than a new version of McCarthyism, a tremendous "peer pressure", and often self-censorship, against any potential criticism of the Israeli genocide in Gaza or of the global warmongering in Western countries. Anyone wishing to express an opinion about Ukraine in the mainstream media must leave aside the NATO expansion towards the East since the 1990s, betraying commitments to let the Soviet Union die in peace. He or she must also leave aside that a similar extension of a rival power to the US backyard would never have been tolerated (recall the Cuban missile crisis and the overthrow of several Latin American governments).

Other mandatory conditions for any voice wanting to be heard via the mainstream media are beautifying the Ukrainian regime, ignoring the many common features it shares with the Russian

autocracy and pretending it is a model democracy. It is also mandatory to deny the oligarchic nature of the Zelensky entourage, or its well-known complicity in the fraudulent scheme known as the Panama Papers, or the robbery of millions of dollars donated by Western Allies which were meant to feed, clothe and arm the soldiers in war. And, of course, it is mandatory to whitewash the persecution of labour activism by Zelensky, as well as the 2014 massacre by neo-Nazis in the Union House in Odessa and the ethnic persecution against the big Russian speaking minority. The mandatory contrast is with anything Russian, from the banned Shostakovich or Dostoevski, to the valiant anti-war protesters, whom the Western Russophobe hates as much as Putin does himself.

In short, any one saying that history did not begin with the Russian invasion of the Ukraine risks to be subjected to political lynching, as António Guterres when he said that History had not begun on the 7th October. The mainstream press became a mirror of the official propaganda, presenting a war in black and white. Any intent to understand the broader context, the contradictory motives or the dynamics of the process is immediately stigmatized as pro-Putinist "campism". There is no room for dialectical analysis, which would undermine the NATO-Manichaeism.

The most that left wing voices are allowed to distinguish is between the good Ukrainian war and the bad Israeli war crimes. But even this seems too subtle for the unwritten style book of the present warmongering, because the good Ukrainian warriors openly condone the bad Israeli war criminals. Whoever in the left and in the workers' movement says "A" today will be compelled to say "B" tomorrow; whoever gives the warmongering a little finger will soon be unable to recover their hand or even their whole arm.

HOW A WAR FOR THE UKRAINE BECAME A WAR FOR A WESTERN AGENDA

Among the more nuanced questions that should be asked at this stage is whether the Ukraine war, which started as a national defensive war on the Ukrainian side, is to remain a national defensive war forever. Finland's national defensive war in 1939 never mutated into an aggression from Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union, because there was a time gap between each of them. But wasn't it close enough to mutate? How and when does a war of national defense mutate into an imperialist war? How and when does our opposition to both sides of an imperialist war start to supersede our solidarity with an oppressed nation? One common-sense argument is that there will not be a NATO versus Russia war in Ukraine as long as there are no NATO "boots on the ground" there. And, indeed, as long as the cannon fodder is only Ukrainian, this war will depend massively on Ukrainians' will to defend their country, so it will remain, up to a point, a national defensive war on the Ukrainian side.

But the cannon fodder is not everything in a war. The money, the hardware, the technology, the training and the intelligence have long been supplied to the Ukrainian side by NATO or NATO's member-countries. The policy of this war is also a lot more complex than the mere defense of the Ukraine: as far as the USA is concerned, it aims to weaken Russia, as Pentagon-chief Lloyd

Austin blatantly admitted.¹ A Ukrainian defense war can mutate to be simultaneously a NATO-proxy war.

At the very beginning of the war, the USA had suggested that Zelensky run away and build an exile government. The White House was not interested in a national defense of the Ukraine, didn't want to move a finger for that, and just encouraged the desertion of the Ukrainian president. But, as it became self-evident that the war would go on anyway, the White House and the Pentagon saw the opportunity to transform it into something that would serve their own goals.

Zelensky himself had ignored the Western suggestion to desert² but, after that initial bravado, he emerged as the most engaged politician in the transformation of the Ukraine war into a NATO and EU war against Russia. This metamorphosis in the nature of the conflict would skyrocket the danger of a nuclear war. And, no matter how weakened and corrupted the Russian Army has shown to be, in the scenario of a nuclear war, the first victims would not be the European countries, but the Ukrainian people.

The process of Zelensky going global is most clearly to be seen in his attitude towards the Middle East. As Russia invaded the Ukraine, one might have expected him to moderate his enthusiasm for the Israeli occupation in Palestine, at least as a tribute to the needs of a coherent Ukrainian war propaganda. But the iron logic of political alliances supersedes the logic of coherent propaganda. While Putin courts the European far right (Orbán with some results, Le Pen, Meloni, Salvini, Abascal, Ventura with decreasing success), Zelensky makes his support for the Gaza genocide³ the focal point for a far-right community with Latin-American fascists such as Bolsonaro or Milei.

In doing so, he is one step ahead of the US imperialist policy, which still welcomed the ousting of Bolsonaro and not the election of Milei; which still welcomes the genocide in Gaza but not yet an all-out-war against Iran; which already revoked Nixon's One China policy but is not yet ready for an all-out-war against China. Zelensky does not stand for a Ukrainian defense war against the Russian invasion, but for a global war strategy of the Western powers and a radicalization of the Western warmongering.

We should not just look at Zelensky as a free lancer, with no chance whatsoever of seeing his global war strategy adopted, sooner or later, by the main Western powers. Kiev and Tel Aviv are just the avant-garde of the global warmongering: none other than the French president, Emmanuel Macron, used his visit to Israel in the early stages of the Gaza genocide to call for a coalition against Hamas with the same allies who had been

fighting against Daesh.⁴ He might just as well have said the same allies who are coalescing against Russia, because that is what he meant. And, even if the evidence of the genocide and the broadness of the protest movement worldwide softened this kind of Western rhetoric for a moment, the drive is still there.

The drive can best be noticed in Germany, where the social-democratic Defense Minister Boris Pistorius waves the ghost of an "attack by Russia" in "a period of five to eight years" and calls for "intensive" preparation for war from now on⁵. Besides, he mentions the security upheavals and conflicts worldwide, whether "in Israel, Yemen, Syria, the Balkans, the Caucasus or the Indo-Pacific". He calls the public to support a policy of making Germany "fit for war" and openly admits to wanting to go back to having a conscripted army⁶.

General Patrick Sanders, head of the British army, also issued a statement in the same direction in front of one thousand British top military leaders.⁷ And, although the government prohibited the press from publishing Sanders' speech, it is clear that then prime minister, Rishi Sunak, found only the publicising unwise, not the idea of conscription itself. At the same time, Admiral Rob Bauer, chairperson of NATO's Military Committee, said at a meeting of top defense chiefs that it may be necessary to "find more people if it comes to war", by means of "mobilization, reservists or conscription".⁸ And Macron leaves no doubt about the use he intends for the fresh supply of cannon fodder coming with the conscription, when he admits having French troops fighting in the Ukraine.⁹ So, we can hear the sabre-rattling nearly everywhere.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE TO PREVENT A WORLD WAR?

The complex and contradictory nature of the Ukraine war shouldn't however have a paralyzing effect in a moment when action is required. Neither should the indifference of broad masses to the nature of the war stop us from doing what is right. Russian pacifists opposed the war with remarkable courage from the first moment on and paid a heavy price, meeting ruthless repression. The workers' movement in the West must target NATO and the Western governments, exactly as the Russian pacifists targeted Putin and his oligarchs. Once again, as in Liebknecht's time, the main enemy is at home.

Forgetting this would leave us at the mercy of economic policies aimed for preparing a major war. If war is a continuation of politics by other means, budgetary policy is a continuation of war by other means. No matter how sympathetic we remain, to the

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/25/russia-weakened-loyd-austin-ukraine-visit/>

2 Braithwaite, Sharon. Zelensky refuses US offer to evacuate, saying "I need ammunition, not a ride".

CNN. 26 February, 1:06 p.m. update. 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/26/europe/ukraine-zelensky-evacuation-intl/index.html>

3 Eruygur, Burc. Supporting Tel Aviv's war, Zelenskyy says Israel can go "beyond laws". AA.com.tr.

6 November (updated 8 November), 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/supporting-tel-aviv-war-zelenskyy-says-israel-can-go-beyond-laws/3045702>

4 Ricard, Philippe, Imbert, Louis and Smolar, Piotr. Macron surprises leaders with proposal to "fight Hamas" with international coalition against IS. Le Monde. 25 October, 11:52 a.m. update. 2023.

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/10/25/emmanuel-macron-surprend-en-proposant-de-mobiliser-la-coalition-internationale-contre-l-ei-pour-lutter-contre-le-hamas_6196349_3210.html

5 <https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Pistorius-warnt-vor-russischem-Angriff-auf-NATO-article24673573.html>

6 <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/pistorius-wir-muessen-kriegstuechtig-werden,Tu6Tlcz>

7 Sabbagh, Dan and Walker, Peter. Army chief says people of UK are "prewar generation" who must be ready to fight Russia. The Guardian. 24 January. 2024.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/jan/24/army-chief-says-people-of-uk-are-prewar-generation-who-must-be-ready-to-fight-russia>

8 <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/officer-issues-conscription-warning-as-nato-braces-for-all-out-war-with-russia/ar-BB1gW4HQ>

9 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/2/frances-macron-doesnt-rule-out-troops-for-ukraine>

Ukrainians who defend their country against a Russian invasion, we must acknowledge that the main Western goal is not a real free Ukrainian democracy, but the imperialist purpose to weaken Russia at the expense of Ukrainian lives.. Whenever American or European governments ask their parliaments for increased military spending in order to defend Ukraine, they really mean more money to prepare a major war, which has nothing to do with defending Ukraine. Once again, the workers' movement should stand against war credits.

The budget constraints around the Ukraine war have become still more acute since the start of Israel's war on Gaza and with the preparation of its aggression on Lebanon. This was not expected, since the main military power in the Middle East was supposed to annihilate the Palestinian resistance in a couple of hours after 7 October. Yet this huge military power, which in 1967 had beaten a coalition of middle sized powers in just six days, is still, after ten months, desperately struggling to reduce a barefoot army.

The forces on both sides are so uneven that we should rather speak about genocide and not about war. But the unexpected resilience of the Hamas-militias and the length of the fighting are such that they raise very complex problems of financing a regular war. And for the USA, it means financing two expensive wars simultaneously. The long lasting blockade of the US budget meant that both Democrats and Republicans wanted to keep slaughtering the Palestinians, but one section of GOP congress-people wished to pay all the Israeli bills but no longer all the Ukrainian bills.

For the GOP, the Gaza genocide must be propagated as Israeli self-defense, but the Ukraine war still smells too much like self-defense and therefore is not rewarding enough for the US-imperialist interests. Although a bipartisan compromise was reached in the meantime, this contradiction may come up, in a even more acute form, under a very likely second term of Donald Trump in the White House. Now, the choice between two imperialist parties discussing how to use almost US\$80 billion for two imperialist wars should really be none of the working class' business.

For the time being, if we are to believe what is apparent from the average behavior of the male, Caucasian, American worker, most of the US working class is supporting Trump for a second term, and "Genocide Joe", while he was still on the race, and Kamala Harris now paid a heavy price among Arab-American and Afro-American voters, for whom Palestinian lives matter. But the bloodshed in Gaza still does not shake the conscience of the US working class as such. This means that the US working class will only notice what catastrophe comes upon her when the budget discussion becomes a discussion about wage cuts and cuts in social spending.

In Germany, there was no budget blockade because all three government parties agreed to massive cuts in healthcare, education, and social welfare, while they also agreed to spend twice as much in the 2024 budget on the armed forces as was spent in 2017. Although the sabotage of Nord Stream was, in the meantime, exposed as an American and Ukrainian operation, which enormously damaged German interests and enormously raised its energetic bill, the red-yellow-green coalition remains

an unshakeable supporter of both the NATO war effort in the Ukraine and the Israeli war effort in the Gaza genocide.

As said above, the Arab-Americans, the Afro-Americans and even increasing numbers of liberal Jews in the USA are standing up against the Gaza war, but the working class is still paralyzed. In Germany one and a half million came to the streets against the deportation plans of the far-right, but few demonstrate against the second Nakba. It seems the working class will only raise against the warmongering when it feels the effects of the new budgetary choices in their pockets under the spell of a policy of economic warfare.

Yet, for a socialist policy, to oppose a war cannot mean sleeping until its very eve and waking up when it is already in full motion. To oppose a war means above all to pre-empt it. The history of the workers' movement is full of pre-emptive campaigns, before would-be wars, in order to prevent their outbreak. Sometimes they succeeded, as with a Morocco war that did not actually take place between France and Germany in 1905/6, sometimes they failed, as with the First World War in 1914.

The pre-emption strategy is key today, as it was for the huge international movement against the US-invasion on Iraq in 2003, which lasted for several months and shook the Blair-government in the UK, to the point that it was facing the scenario of a very likely ousting, and the Bush-administration had much trouble with going ahead with the invasion. Now the enormous demonstrations which take place worldwide against the genocide in Gaza are also a mighty factor against the expansion of the war to the whole Middle East, in a broader context of antagonizing Russia and China.

There is no world war and no nuclear war yet, but both are in the making. Not one more dollar, not one more bullet should be supplied to the Israeli genocide or generally to imperialist wars or imperialist war plans. The workers must stand against the warmongering of their respective governments. We stand against any sacrifices that the next Portuguese government may ask the workers on behalf of a NATO-strategy ■

Lisbon, 30th July 2024