

CLASS WAR

August 2014

Neither Ukrainian nor Russian!

Let's develop our own camp, the third camp, that of social revolution!

When we wrote some months ago in our text, "War preparations between Ukraine and Russia – Show or Reality?"1 that the conditions for a new war ripen in Ukraine, many comrades expressed doubts or even disagreements with such a categorical statement. Now we can say that the conflict in Ukraine has clearly switched from the "cold" phase to the "hot" one and that what we are currently witnessing in the east of the country is the war by all definitions. From Lugansk on the border with Russia to Mariupol on the Black Sea coast two military forces compete in daily clashes when trying to enlarge the area under their control, they fight on the ground as well as in the air, in countryside as well as in industrial centers, artilleries shell villages, air forces bomb cities (under the pretext that their enemy uses the inhabitants as living shields), men, women, children die under the bombs and missiles... In four months of armed conflict more than 2,000 civilians and militaries have been killed and 6,000 others injured; 117,000 proletarians have been internally displaced and 730,000 others found refuge in Russia. Just as we were on the point of finishing this article dead bodies are strewn over the streets of Donetsk, caught in a government's offensive stranglehold.

In the same text we also wrote that the only reply of the proletariat to the war is to organize and develop revolutionary defeatism, i.e. practically refuse to join one or the other camp, on the contrary to build connections between proletarians from both sides of the conflict through the struggle against both bourgeoisies. As even in this field things developed, our text deserves (three month after publishing) a post-scriptum.

This text is based on information drawn from different sources (that we quote in footnotes) from militant blogs to official media. This short description of events in the Ukraine required hours and hours of careful work, searching information, reading texts, watching videos, comparing different data etc. We would like to emphasize two things: Firstly, the fact that the events that we describe here were not covered by BBC or Euronews does not mean that they did not happen, that we invented them (various leftist sources and also Ukrainian and Russian media describe them). Secondly, it is clear that the news that we get from the Ukraine are chaotic, incomplete and sometimes contradictory. This however doesn't mean that we should give up our attempt to grasp what is going on there. We believe that we should face a selective reporting of the state with a critical and radical position of anti-capitalist movement; we should develop and share information and analysis that see the world through a prism of revolutionary perspective.

War ideology (either based on a defence of a united national state on one side or the right for a self-determination and pro-Russian sympathies on the other side) is taking root in Ukraine, civil society organizations organize fund-raising campaign to support the army, popes bless arms of this or that side, and television repeats scenes of babushkas supplying armed man with their last jar of compote. Not all proletarians however let themselves to be brainwashed with the war propaganda of one or the other side, not all of them want to sacrifice themselves "for their homeland". Expressions of practical refuse of war slaughter appear in always greater numbers and both sides of the conflict have big difficulties to recruit new manpower for their mutual massacre.

Thousands of soldiers of the Ukrainian army that the government sent in the so-called anti-terrorist operations (ATO) in the east of the country, deserted or switched to the other side with all equipment, including tanks and armoured vehicles. As for example the Ukrainian 25th airborne brigade (elite troop par excellence), whose servicemen have been accused of "displaying cowardice" during fighting in Kramatorsk, was disbanded on April 17th because expressing refusal to "fight against other Ukrainians".2 The most recently it was a unit of 400 soldiers that deserted and took refuge on the Russian side of the border after finding itself without any ammunition under a heavy fire. The soldiers that will be, as Russia already announced, extradited back to Ukrainian territory, testified that they prefer rather be charged of desertion than to continue to kill and be killed on the eastern front. All the deserters claimed that they do not want to fight against "their own people" and they also denounced desperate living conditions, which they had to face in the army - lousy pay, lousy food, or even lack of it, etc. Other units were not even deployed in the east for their unreliability. In the same way as they could not be used by former President Yanukovych to suppress the demonstrators, neither the current government dares to send to the conflict the troops known for their minimal loyalty.

About one thousand soldiers of units from the region of Volhynia mutinied in Mykolayiv on May 29th. Servicemen of 3rd battalion of 51st brigade refused to be sent back to the front, they refused the orders of their superiors and they started to unload the heavy machinery and other material already prepared for transport. They were promised, after the unit had suffered heavy losses in a confrontation with the separatists near a village of Volnovakha, to return to their home barracks in Rivno. Instead of that they were moved from the east to the south and back so that the authorities could finally announce them that they will continue their training before being sent again to the front. "Having lost any kind of trust in the generals in light of the latest events at Volnovakha and dur-

ing the funerals in Rivne, and the betrayal of the generals; the soldiers have begun an open rebellion."³

Also the 2nd battalion of 51st brigade that was situated in the barracks in Rivno in the same time and witnessed both funerals of soldiers from 3rd battalion killed in the gunfight in Volnovakha and chaotic and lying leadership of the operations mutinied. "The generals were saying "go north" then "go south" to the extent that the soldiers are ready to shoot them. The generals have begun wearing bulletproof vests out of fear of fragging!"⁴ About 1,200 soldiers took part to the mutiny; they refused to be transferred to Mykolayiv. "They promised, when they called upon us, that we would be guarding the Ukranian-Belorussian border. We are ready to do so, but to move on those Donbas clowns we are not!"⁵

Similar rebellion appeared also on May 28th in Poltava.

Four days earlier, after six soldiers originally from the region of Volhynia were killed, mothers, wives and relatives of soldiers of 51st brigade blocked the roads in the region of Volhinya to protest against further deployment of the unit in Donbas.

Demonstrations and protests organized by wives and other relatives of draftees asking return of soldiers home or trying to block their departure to the front meanwhile spread to other regions of the Ukraine (Bukovina, Lviv, Kherson, Melitopol, Volhynia etc.). Families of the soldiers were blocking the roads with chopped down trees in the region of Lviv at the beginning of June.⁷ A demonstration of relatives blocked the entrance of military enlistment office in Lviv some days later.8 In Iavorivo (region of Lviv) family members occupied an exercising ground of 24th mechanized brigade and they demanded a withdrawal of departure to the frontline.9 Demonstrations of relatives in Dnepropetrovsk and Kharkov demanded return of the soldiers to the barracks in their native regions.¹⁰ Women from Kharkov occupied local military airport. Local military enlistment office in Kherson was occupied by soldiers' mothers and wives. They called for end of the war with slogans like: "Women against war", "Where do sons of oligarchs serve?" or "Our children are not a cannon fodder". 11 In Chernovtsy women blocked the highway to Zhitomir for several days and they claimed return of soldiers home. 12 On June 24th relatives blocked 125th kilometre of highway Kyiv-Chop, they were holding banners like: "Bring back our children, send generals' children to the East".13 On June 8th, a group of 100 soldiers' relatives blocked troops from the 3033 military unit based in Melitopol, in the region of Zaporozhe. The protest managed to prevent the soldiers from being sent to the front. The relatives involved in the protest movement also protested against the state propaganda that describes them as "pro-Russian separatists": "Yesterday the news talked of 'pro-Russian separatists staged a blockade of the military unit'. But there was no mention of Russia at the gate of the military unit! We just do not want to lose our families' breadwinners. (...). Donetsk is a massacre, and our children are 20-21 years old. (...) You see us, we are mothers! How can you call us separatists!", claimed one of the participating women.¹⁴ Mothers and wives of soldiers protested against their sending to the front in front of the military base in Ternopil on July 15th.15

And it is not the first time the families of soldiers confront a military action. During the period that finally resulted in a fall of former president Janukovych relatives and other people organised meetings in front of barracks, they discussed with the soldiers in order to bring them information about what was really going on in the streets and to persuade them to refuse to participate in a potential crackdown on demonstrators.

Meanwhile new men continue to be conscripted to the army. Even if they must enlist on the basis of an obligatory military card, the government still passes them for volunteers. "We are no volunteers (...) we do not want to kill people (...) we will not go anywhere, we will take off our uniforms and we will go home", proclaimed draftees in a protest rally in Lviv.¹⁶

After the Presidential Decree of Poroshenko about the third wave of mobilization in the military forces came in force on July 24th, what would send further thousands of proletarians to the front, unrests broke up in several places in Western Ukraine with new force: in the village of Voloka the whole population resisted to the conscription of 50 men. "They begun - let themselves resolve. We will die but we will not give our children. They must understand it and don't come here with their call-up papers", an old protester declared.¹⁷ Relatives of soldiers blocked a road near the village of Korovia on July 25th demanding an end of the mobilisation and sons of authorities to be sent to the front instead. 18 The same day a road in Obukhivs'kyi district, near Kyiv, was blocked by families of soldiers too. Blockades continued further also on July 28th in seven villages in Bukovina region and the highway Kyiv - Chop was blocked again too. During an anti-war demonstration in front of a recruiting office in Novoselytsa protesters beat up a district council member who tried to talk to them.¹⁹ Inhabitants of several villages of Ivano-Frankivsk region broke into the office of local military administration on July 22nd and burnt down call-up papers and other documents considering the mobilisation. The same happened the same day in Bogorodchany.²⁰ In different villages people massively burnt conscription documents delivered by post.21 In Mukachevo, in Transcarpathia the situation escalated so that its military commander worrying about continuation of the protests suspended the mobilisation for the time being and promised that none of the locals will be sent to the front in near future.²² Other militant mobilizations against the war also occurred in the region of Zaporozhe on August 4th as well as in front of the parliament in Kviv the day after.23

Kyiv that can currently hardly count on its regular army has therefore rely on private armies of some oligarchs and National Guard, volunteers' militia formed mainly from nationalists of Pravyi Sektor (Right sector) and Svoboda (Freedom) party during the protest movement against Janukovych. The new units of National Guard are not especially trained for military actions, but mainly for repression of mass protests and riots, as revealed their parade in Kyiv at the end of June. For that matter, hundreds of fascists from National-socialist assembly and Ukrainian patriots attacked already in June a demonstration against anti-terrorist operation that was taking place in Kyiv.

Neither the members of the National Guard are nevertheless out of the contradictions shaking both of the camps. Radio Free Europe published recently a video²⁴ that shows a serviceman of the National Guard blaming the government for not being able to provide the volunteers with enough of food, water and guns: "We're used as cannon fodder" he states. Material conditions here catch up even those who thing that they are ideologically above them.

Mercenaries from all over the world also fight on the side of Kyiv, they were hired for the government by private agencies (reportedly it concerns mercenary troops from Poland, the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslavia, but also from the area of equatorial Africa).

Recruitment of new fighters doesn't advance according to the wishes of the local warlords in the camp of the separatists either. The majority of miners of the region of Donbas still refuse to join their side. Instead of that they form units of self-defence standing against both separatists and government troops. One of these units clashed with the separatists and prevented them to blow up a mine in the village of Makiivka. In Krasnodon, in the region of Lugansk, in May miners organized a general strike and took the control of the city. They openly refused to join either the side of separatists' "anti-Maidan" in Lugansk, or the side of the oligarchs of the Maidan in Kyiv, and they called for increase of their wages and against hiring labour force for the mine via private agencies instead.²⁵

Miners from six mines in Donbas basin started to strike at the end of May calling for an end of the anti-terrorist operation in the east of the country and retreat of the troops.²⁶ Their action was a result of their own initiative and was not forced in any way by armed men of Donetsk People's Republic as claimed some media. According to the strikers war represents a danger for the very existence of the mines and brings unemployment. "On Monday May 26th, when the Ukrainian army began bombings of the towns, the miners simply did not turn up to work, because the 'external factor' of hostilities taking place almost at their doorstep seriously increased the risk of industrial accidents at their enterprise. For example, had a bomb hit the electrical substation, the miners would have been trapped underground, which to them would inevitably mean death."27 The strike was started by some 150 miners form the mine Oktyabrskiy and it spread like a chain reaction onto other pits of the Donetsk (Skochinskiy, Abakumov, "Trudovskaya", etc.) but also to collieries of other cities, particularly Ugledar ("Yuzhnodonbasskaya no. 3"). In mines owned by Rinat Achmetov, the richest man of Ukraine and owner of an industrial empire economically controlling practically the whole eastern part of the country workers were forced to continue to work, they continued to go down the pits despite bombardment of the close neighbourhood. Also from the initiative of the miners of Oktyabrskiy mine (and again without any support of Donetsk People's Republic) an antiwar demonstration of several thousand of participants was organised on May $28^{\text{th}.28}$ On June 18^{th} several thousands of miners demonstrated for immediate end of military operations in the centre of Donetsk again. The participants claimed that they are not separatists, but ordinary people of Donbas. They also declared that if the Kyiv government didn't meet their demands, they would take up guns.

Separatists as well as local pro-Kyiv oligarchs try to manipulate and interpret these chaotic and contradictory assemblies according to their own interests. Rinat Achmetov, the oligarch of Donetsk therefore organised his own "strike" for united Ukraine, separatists on the other hand try to pass the miners manifestations for an expression of pro-Russian position of Donbas workers.

Despite nationalist or separatist mottos that appear in miners' demonstrations, workers are not very keen to join the Donbas People's Militia. One of the separatist commanders, Igor Girkin, recently publicly complaint that local people take guns from his armoury, but instead of serving with them in separatists' militias, they bring them to their homes to protect their families and villages against both sides of the conflict.²⁹ Separatists therefore continue to count on local criminal gangs which (after being paid) helped them to take control of governmental buildings, police stations, armouries, arterial roads and communication devices during several months lasting operation in the region of Donetsk and Lugansk. The majority of separatists' forces is nevertheless made of mercenaries from the opposite side of the (Russian) border, particularly the veterans of Chechnya wars.

If the real anti-war movement, the movement of revolutionary defeatism, wants to succeed, it has to become not only massive and generalized, but it also has to get organized, get structured. We have only little information about organisational structures of the movement in Ukraine. We can deduce the existence of some structures from the events themselves (repeating demonstrations or strikes of several thousand people cannot be a result of a spontaneous explosion of anger, in the same way protests of soldiers' relatives, as we have described them above, demand a certain level of coordination, organized collaboration on the level of content and practice), existence of other formal or informal organisational structures is confirmed by incomplete information we get from the field. Some already existing associations turned into frameworks centralising anti-war activities - for example Donetsk region Parents Community "Kroha" that published an appeal to the public on June 10th, however limited, contradictory and pacifist it can be: "We, the parents of Donetsk region, appeal to you, politicians, public figures, people who care. Help save the people of Sloviansk, Krasny Liman, Kramatorsk, stop the military operations. We need

your help in bringing home the truth about what is happening in these cities. For many weeks, people live under incessant artillery fire. Civilians constantly die. Some children have been injured; the death of three children is confirmed. Houses, hospitals, kindergartens and schools are collapsing. People, including children, live in a permanent state of stress, hiding for many hours from almostnever-stopping attacks in basements. (...) We ask for your help in saving the lives of these people and stopping military actions."31 Another association, Donbas Mothers claims in its declaration: "We just want to live! We, ordinary people: husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. We, peaceful civilians, are the hostages of the conflict in our region, the victims of military clashes. We are tired of fear and crave for peace. We want to live in our houses, walk along the streets of our cities, work at the companies and organizations of our region, and farm our land. (...) We, mothers of Donbas, insist on putting an immediate stop to the antiterrorist operation and any military actions in our region! (...) We are sure that the conflict in our country can be peacefully resolved! Stop the war! Avert children's deaths! Save the people of Donbas!"32 The Voice of Odessa organized a demonstration against war on July 13^{th} in Odessa. The participants shouted mottos as "We are against the war!", "Stop ATO in the East!" or "We want peace!" The flash mob featured chilling audio recordings of artillery shelling and the impact on civilians.33 In Kharkov local anti-war associations (among others the Women's Movement of Kharkov "Kharkivianka") organized a demonstration in front of tank factory VA Malyshev on June 20^{th} . This factory received an order for 400armored vehicles to be sent to the front. The demonstrators demanded cancellation of the order and shouted slogans as "No to war" or "Stop the senseless killing!"34

Social and economic situation in the whole Ukraine meanwhile gets worse. Devaluation of the local currency, increase in prices of basic goods, transport and services and cuts in production in many companies lead to a sharp decrease of real wages estimated between 30 and 50 percent of losses. Kyiv government, under a pressure of international financial institutions has to adopt series of austerity measures that will further worsen the living conditions of the proletariat, in the same time it is preparing the biggest wave of privatization since 20 years. Central government stopped since May the payment of wages of state employees, social benefits and pensions in the territories that are not under its control, thousands of workers are therefore without any incomes. Situation in the regions where military operations take place is even worse – supplies of electricity and water are interrupted, medicine and food are scarce.

Social unrests precipitated by this situation appear since a certain time. Besides the miners' strikes in the eastern part of the country also the proletarians in the western regions start to have enough. Miners of Krivoy Rog started a general unlimited strike in May demanding a double increase of their wages. They started to organize self-defence armed militias. In their declaration addressed to workers in all Europe they describe Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs, whatever side they are on (separatist or Kyiv one) as the main reason for the crisis: "We turn to you with a call to support our struggle against the oligarchs, who have brought Ukraine into the current crisis and who continue to destabilise it further, threatening to provoke a fratricidal war in Ukraine which without any doubt will have catastrophic consequences for all of Europe." 35

Several demonstrations for "decent living conditions", against increasing in prices and for increase in wages and pensions took place in different cities in the whole country. (Series of actions against increase in prices of housing and utility tariffs took place for example in Kyiv during late June and July. On July 1st a demonstration against rise in prices went on in Kharkov. The biggest protest so far took place in Kyiv on July 24th under mottos as "Cut the oligarchs, not the people" and "Do not rob ordinary citizens".)³⁶

Early August the last handful of resisters who continued to occupy Maidan square in Kyiv ("because nothing has changed!") is at-

tacked by two battalions of the National Guard to evict them. They were acting by order of the new mayor Vitali Klitchko, what demonstrates once again that promises of a bourgeois politician (early this year he asked the occupiers not to evacuate the square "as long as there is no genuine changes in Ukraine") only involve those who believe in them... Violent clashes nevertheless broke out during the eviction, what the international bourgeois media didn't talk about once again, since the Kyiv government is the Western ally and the "ultimate horror" can only be embodied by the Eastern separatists and Russia.

Donetsk People's Republic tries to restrain the miners' movement that cares more for their material interests than any ideology, while balancing between demands of strikers who were promised a nationalization of industrial complexes and interests of oligarchs who were promised inviolability of private property.

The anti-war movement, even if it is so far limited in both space and content, workers' strikes and demonstrations not for ideology but for material interests of proletariat in both camps, all that confirms what we wrote in our previous text: "(...) the triggering of the imperialist war (...) doesn't necessarily mean the definitive crushing of the proletariat. Indeed, historically, if the war in the first time means a relative crushing, it can then dialectically determine a re-emergence of the struggles all the more strong since it is the war that exposes the contradictions and the brutality immanent to the capitalist system."

Yet we can again and again meet with so-called "revolutionaries" defending the anti-terrorist operation, because they believe that it will allow a return to the "normal" class struggle. Yet we can read (even if fragmentary and contradictory) news about "anarchists" active in separatists administration structures, because they consider them to be a lesser evil in comparison with Kyiv government.

We do not support war and its atrocities in any way and we are aware that any military conflict means worsening of living conditions of proletarians. However we, as communists, cannot adopt a thesis that we could prevent a military conflict while supporting one or another war sides. Proletariat has no interest in preserving present or previous conditions of its misery. Proletariat has no homeland to defend. The side of proletariat in any war is a united and uncompromising action of proletarians of both competing camps against both war camps of bourgeoisie.

The struggle against war means revolutionary defeatism! Revolutionary proletarian front against bourgeoisie from both war camps!

Let's confront the war with direct action, sabotage, general, radical and combative strike!

Class solidarity with revolutionary defeatists from all camps!

★ August 2014 **★**



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⁵ Idem.

⁶ http://www.volynpost.com/news/33715-vijskovi-z-51-oi-brygadyvlashtuvaly-na-mykolaivschyni-bunt via

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⁸ http://ukraineantifascistsolidarity.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/soldiersrelatives-block-military-recruitment-office-in-lviv/

Idem.

¹⁰ Idem.

11 http://ukraineantifascistsolidarity.wordpress.com/2014/06/11/khersonsoldiers-relatives-picket-military-enlistment-office/

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¹⁹ http://www.youtube.com/embed/0WbCvUoZEQ

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²² <u>http://www.aitrus.info/node/3875/</u> via http://libcom.org/forums/news/protests-ukraine-02122013?page=11#comment-541714

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