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No War But Class War

Against State Nationalism and Inter-Imperialist War
in Ukraine

Anarchists in Oakland, San Francisco, New York,
and Pittsburgh

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obvious positions for all anarchists, anti-racists/anti-fascists and anti-authoritarians. Our opposition to US involvement in foreign wars and to joining forces with the Ukrainian state and far-right militias in the territorial defense of Ukraine, does not make us allies of the Russian state: we condemn invasion and militarization and act in solidarity with anti-war protestors, defectors from the armed forces, and conscription saboteurs risking their lives and freedom in Russia, in Ukraine, and the world over. But to oppose Russian aggression must not equate support for Ukraine, if we are to maintain a commitment to the principles of anti-fascism, anti-nationalism, the destruction of all borders dividing supposed “deserving” citizens from migrants and refugees, and the state militaries that conscript or coerce its poorest citizens into fighting wars on behalf of the ruling classes.

Anarchists do not fight to create or defend the sovereignty of states. We fight to dismantle the divisions, both material and ideological, that create them. In this spirit we take issue when, within our movements, it becomes challenging to distinguish the interests of US foreign policy and weapons manufacturers from our own. The dangers of reactionary and counter-revolutionary tendencies necessitate vigilance. We welcome the principled refusal to stand on any side of a war between imperialist states, the refusal to support NATO hegemony and US imperialism, and refusal of a popular front with fascists.

In the spirit of Sholem Schwarzbard,

—Anarchists in Oakland, San Francisco, New York, and Pittsburgh

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unlike those whose deaths at home they consider so “tragic.” The defensive allegiance to whiteness on display is nauseating.

As tensions at home and abroad continue to escalate, civil wars are not unimaginable. In the spirit of advancing class struggle and avoiding heartbreaking situations, we hope to abate the concerning tendencies of nationalist creep. We have no desire to hear any more militarist calls for the escalation of inter-imperialist wars among anarchists. We have no desire to hear anarchists calling for “de-escalation,” in contexts like that of Reinoehl again.

Against All Nation-States

We certainly don’t think that the Russian Federation is by any means anti-fascist. On the contrary, Putin has opportunistically been backing far-right movements across Europe for many years. Olena Semenyaka, the “first lady of Ukrainian nationalism” and the international secretary of the Azov Battalion’s political party the National Corps, was friendly and even collaborated with Aleksandr Dugin (“Putin’s Rasputin”) until the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. It’s true that there are fascists on all sides of the conflict. There are fascists everywhere, but this fact should not be used to minimize their disproportionate power in Ukraine. Although Neo-Nazis around the world may share a similar vision with the Azov movement’s founder when he proclaimed his group’s historical mission to “lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led Untermenschen [subhumans],” it is in Ukraine that a homegrown far right movement has amassed the strength and popularity to actually begin to manifest such a heinous goal. We can oppose a Russian victory while finding antifascist value in a Ukrainian defeat.

It is not only the authoritarian left and “Russian disinformation” that are critical of and opposed to NATO imperialism, the far right movement in Ukraine, and Ukrainian nationalism. These should be

munist parties (that had decades of experience in the Kurdish Freedom Movement) on the ground and a member organization of the International Freedom Battalion. Early solidarity efforts focused on promoting the anarchist guerrilla position and strengthening that position within the alliance. However, as more US anarchists began participating in solidarity efforts, these perspectives were increasingly neglected, and the realpolitik of the People's Defense Units (YPG), as the umbrella organization and primary authority among various viewpoints, won out. US anarchists argued that the call to expand US involvement was what "the community" wanted, while in actuality, they themselves had chosen not to amplify the position of the anarchist guerrillas (and their communist allies) and to encourage imperial reaction instead. Our intention here is not to overstate the influence and impact of solidarity groups, but to highlight a trend: US anarchists are promoting, strengthening and *siding* – very deliberately – with reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces around the world, landing again and again on the wrong side of global class struggle.

A concerning and not-unrelated double standard has also developed among some US/NATO-aligned anarchists, with regard to anarchist and anti-racist/anti-fascist struggle in the US. In August 2020, on the heels of the George Floyd Uprising, anti-fascist Michael Reinoehl shot and killed fascist Aaron Danielson, a supporter of the far right group Patriot Prayer in Portland, OR. Before anyone knew the details of what had happened, CrimethInc. and their allies at Ill Will Editions and the Vitalist International (two projects that include "Tiqunists" who have flirted heavily with the far right) denounced what they assumed had happened by calling on comrades "not to be drawn into grudge matches...[or] seek revenge in symmetrical warfare." They lamented, "The escalation to lethal force is tragic for all." However, it seems, when it comes to straight-up militarism aligned with US/NATO strategy abroad, at least CrimethInc. is willing to subordinate all considerations to the war effort, in a "popular front" with white nationalists not

The role of the Anarchists in the present tragedy... is to continue to proclaim that there is but one war of liberation: that which in all countries is waged by the oppressed against the oppressors, by the exploited against the exploiters.

– International Anarchist Manifesto against the War

Imperialism and its servant, militarism, will calculate their profits from every victory and every defeat in this war... From the standpoint of class for the European proletariat as a whole the victory and defeat of any of the warring camps is equally disastrous.

– The Junius Pamphlet

Written in 1915, when the Polish-born, Jewish revolutionary was imprisoned for her anti-war agitation, Rosa Luxemburg's *Junius Pamphlet*, or *The Crisis of Social Democracy*, is one of the most powerful indictments of World War I and the bourgeois society that produced it ever published. Over 100 years since her assassination by the German Freikorps in 1919, Luxemburg's words against war seem eerily appropriate today. She condemns Europe's socialist parties for betraying the First and Second International's foundational position against imperialist war by backing the governments of their respective countries in the "Great War." In the case of her own party, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Luxemburg rejects its claim that the country is engaged in "a war for Liberty against Russian despotism," instead showing how it is an imperialist war on the part of Germany, as much as it is on the part of the Allied powers. Among anarchists, a similar split occurred at the time: Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin advocated joining the war on the side of the Allied powers and was (correctly) denounced by most anarchists, including Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Errico Malatesta.

The capitulation of many socialists and anarchists to state nationalism during World War I and the subsequent damage to global class struggle remains one of the most tragic cautionary tales of modern history. The war divided radical leftists, socialists and anarchists of all stripes. No one tendency was united against the war. Rather, all opponents of imperialism and state nationalism were forced to attack pro-war elements within their own ranks. With the threat of another world war looming, we unfortunately find ourselves forced to do similar with many anarchists today.

We write to address a tendency we have observed: an increasingly pro-war, US/NATO-aligned and fascist-minimizing discourse among some North American anarchists and publishing projects. Having been influenced by some of these anarchists and contributed to some of these projects, we have been silent up until now, assuming good intentions on their part. Nevertheless, over the last few years, we have found positions consistently taken to be incompatible with actual opposition to US intervention in foreign wars (whether in the form of sanctions, no-fly zones or military aid), and it's been unsettling. With regard to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, in particular, we are deeply disturbed by anarchist support for the so-called "Resistance Committee," given that it (like many far right militias in Ukraine) is part of a broader state initiative directed toward strengthening Ukraine's armed forces. To be silent would be to act towards our own defeat as influential North American anarchists take up positions that are, in effect, identical to those repeated ad nauseum on 24-hour liberal news channels and by war hawks in DC.

Solidarity, Not Morality: Back to Basics

We see our lives as a project to be created, and putting this project into practice requires an analysis of the local and global conditions of the class war, social strug-

possibility of anarchy. Anarchy is the inseparability of means and ends. As the comrades wrote in *At Daggers Drawn*:

Liquidating the lie of the *transitional period* (dictatorship before communism, power before freedom, wages before taking the lot, certainty of the results before taking action, requests for financing before expropriation, 'ethical banks' before anarchy, etc.) means making the revolt itself a different way of conceiving relations.

There is no path "from democracy to freedom." True collective liberation has only antagonism for liberal democracy.

Moreover, helmed as it is by Euro-American economic interests and military might, any defense of the Western liberal-democratic project runs inherently counter to any form of liberatory struggle. Subordinating anti-militarism to taking a stand against "dictators" and supporting calls for "help from the West," as we are told to do in "War in Ukraine: Ten Lessons from Syria," an article recently published by CrimethInc., is wholly incompatible with any meaningful anarchist, never mind anti-war, position. The US itself has a history of invasions, proxy wars, regime change "operations" and empowerment of far-right forces around the world that dwarfs the imperialist aspirations of the Russian Federation under Putin. In fact, through calls for sanctions against Russia, the US is currently disrupting Europe's dependence on Russian oil and increasing its own exports of liquefied natural gas, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict is a boon for US defense contractors. Capitalists are going to continue to pursue their own interests in global class struggle, even if we stop pursuing ours.

Still, the anarchist- and Leftist-shift toward side-taking among competing imperialist and nationalist camps, has become increasingly evident over the last several years, especially to those of us who have been involved in Rojava solidarity efforts.

The original anarchist formation in Rojava, the International People's Guerilla Forces (IRPGF), was explicitly allied with com-

among the forces of resistance. For Ukraine, war with Russia will continue to favor fascist violence for the sake of the “nation” and “national unity.” Dissent will continue to be suppressed as “pro-Russian.” People looting to survive will continue to be beaten and stripped and taped to lamp posts and telephone poles for “trying to capitalize on the Russian invasion.” Not only has any Left or anarchist movement, with any chance of countering the far right, been successfully marginalized by neo-Nazis, fascists and the broader far right movement since 2014 (or before), but also, within the framing of war between the Ukrainian state and the Russian Federation, there are no liberatory horizons. That is the issue. It’s important to be clear about that.

Anti-war/Anti-militarism

To praise Ukrainian democracy, on the basis of its parliamentary system and veneer of civil rights, obscures both the fascism latent in liberal democracies, as a form of depoliticized social control, and the relationship of the country’s far right movement to Ukrainian politics. It is, in fact, the tendency positioned to most benefit from war with Russia. Given this context, anarchist platforms that insist on supporting the RC and/or the broader military the group is a part of are colluding with neoliberal and ultranationalist war mongering and espousing militarism. As complicated as they would like their position to be, it isn’t.

In order to understand how some see militarism as justified for the defense of Ukrainian “democracy,” we have to address the tendency among anarchists and Leftists that is, implicitly or explicitly, partisan to Western liberal democracy. This tendency rests on the belief that the conditions of capitalist class rule afforded by liberal democracy are more favorable to liberatory struggle. However, this involves a progressivist view of history that forecloses on the very

gles that are underway, and the projects designed and implemented by the exploiters. It requires communication between anarchist companions, the deepening of mutual understanding that is referred to as “affinity.” It involves the development of an infinite variety of specific projects that antagonize the authorities and expand our freedom.

– Creativity and Insurrection (2006)

The basis of our theory and practice is that the demands of liberatory struggle do not conflict with those of international solidarity. While states attempt to set us against each other for the sake of the capitalist class, global class struggle brings us together against capitalism and the state. Our targets include racializing/hierarchizing state infrastructures of containment, repression and surveillance that foster conditions favorable to the ascendance of fascist projects as well as the fascist projects themselves. As tens of thousands oppose war in the streets of Russia, so too must those of us in the so called US attack it from within. Those who appeal to the US for no-fly zones, military aid and sanctions do not act in solidarity with us. We do not act in solidarity with them.

Who we do and do not act in solidarity with is rooted in the conditions of global class struggle, not morality, which we define here as an invention of liberal conscience, a universalizing system of values and principles of individual conduct that is compatible with capitalism and class society. As a tool of state nationalism, war propaganda makes appeals to morality. We must be prepared to combat it. States present wars as moral issues, framing states at war in terms of “good” and “evil,” “innocent” and “guilty,” to rally public support for what is done in the interests of capital and the state, at the public’s expense. It’s no coincidence that anarchists who support Ukrainian nationalism frame it as the “lesser evil.” It’s telling that they cast deepening cooperation between the Ukrainian state and NATO, a tool of US imperialism, as part of a

“defensive war,” while casting cooperation between Russian separatists in parts of Ukraine’s Donbass region (also known as the “People’s Republics”) and Russia as “imperialist aggression.” Inter-imperialist conflict, where 52% of residents have expressed prioritizing their economic well-being over the identity of their government, as in the disputed territories of the Donbass, would be a much harder sell.

We are not saying Ukrainian nationalists and Russian separatists warring in Ukraine are “imperialist puppets.” We reject such baseless denials of agency and strategy. What we’re saying is that war propaganda doesn’t exist to advance global class struggle, while anarchists do. Wherever thousands of flag waving patriots are set into relief against a backdrop of war between “good” and “evil,” we see the subjugation that marginalized people within a state’s population experience at the hands of “good,” flag waving patriots. In Ukraine, these include (but are not limited to) the African, Arab, Indian, Roma, queer and trans people whose marginalization has recently been compounded by their new status as refugees. Their well documented treatment by Ukraine’s government and many of its citizens – not just those belonging to neo-Nazi, fascist or other far right groups – illustrates exactly what uncritical “allyship” with any European nationalism endorses.

It’s also important to be clear: the imperative anarchist, as well as Leftist, platforms continue to insist on – that we “listen” to anarchists in Ukraine – will not address structural issues any more than “listening” to marginalized individuals in the US. It’s not surprising, but it’s still disappointing to see anarchists who deride basic ally politics, in the context of Black and other nonwhite struggles in the US, deploy them in the context of Ukraine. Ally politics use “representatives” to speak for entire races, ethnicities, countries, etc. regarding struggle, positing groups with no significant intragroup conflicts and disagreements about the means and ends of struggle. Those of us in the US have seen this politics of representation facilitate the state’s recuperation of potentially liberatory struggle.

ultras and is pictured on the Instagram of Hoods Hoods Klan (the core of Arsenal Kyiv ultras). Given the publishing project’s support of the RC, we were shocked to learn from two texts Crime-thInc. published in 2014, that Arsenal Kyiv ultras called a truce with neo-Nazis and collaborated with “national anarchists” (fascists) during the Euromaidan. According to a member of the Autonomous Worker’s Union in Kyiv interviewed by CrimethInc., in one of the published texts:

“Antifascist football fans of ‘Arsenal-Kiev’ decided to join the protest against police brutality. They declared [a] truce with Nazis and joined the fights against the police. Also, ‘Arsenal-Kiev’ fans made a call for all anarchists and anti-fascists to join their struggle, while they were cooperating with national-anarchists from ‘Avtonomy Opir.’ After anarchists spoke some criticism about such alliance, football fans threatened everyone criticizing them with violence. Of course, this proclamation [had] a reverse effect as even more people turned their back to football fans.”

In our research, we found other first-hand accounts that confirm Hoods Hoods Klan Arsenal Kyiv ultras participated in the Euromaidan protests. These accounts also confirm that there was, at least for a time, a truce with neo-Nazis, and that the ultras, as well as many Leftists, collaborated with Avtonomy Ophir/Autonomous Resistance, an organization of third-positionist “national anarchists” closely associated with Svoboda until they split from the ultranationalist political party during the Euromaidan.

Clearly, some anarchists have not been unaware of the strength of Ukraine’s far right movement and its deeply negative implications for liberatory struggle, which require us to look beyond flags and symbols to the conditions that empowered that movement in the first place. The issue isn’t one of “imperfection” or “impurity”

have also been on the rise. In 2018, after neo-Nazi groups burned down a Roma settlement in Kyiv, stabbed a Roma man to death in Lviv, and far right groups in cities across Ukraine attacked International Women's Day marchers, Amnesty International wrote, "the Ukrainian state is rapidly losing its monopoly on violence."

We are not arguing that "Ukraine is a fascist state." We are making an argument about the rising power of Ukraine's far right movement (full of fascists and neo-Nazis), as it seems that the Ukrainian state is either unable or unwilling to do more than share power with it. This power-sharing is evident, not only in the far right's presence within the state and on the streets, but also in the state's attempt to legislate history through "decommunization laws" passed in the spring of 2015. These four laws criminalize the use of communist symbols and any positive public mention of the Soviet era, while granting legal protection to the surviving members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). Public criticism of these groups is criminalized, despite their ties to neo-Nazis and history of ethnic cleansing, pogroms, and collaboration with German Nazis during World War II. It was on the basis of these "decommunization laws" that communist parties were also banned in 2015, and recently, citing martial law, Ukraine's current president Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced the immediate suspension of 11 more parties, none of which are far right, and the nationalization and merging of all major news stations into a single media entity called "United News."

"It's hard to deny that the current situation definitely serves the reactionary forces," as a comrade in Ukraine recently put it. With this in mind, we find anarchist support for the "Resistance Committee" (from here on referred to as the RC) and the lack of detail with which anarchist platforms have presented and promoted the RC alarming. The RC exists within the purview of Ukraine's armed forces, as part of the country's widely popular, all volunteer Territorial Defense Forces. The group includes Arsenal Kyiv

What this amounts to in the context of Ukraine plays directly into the hands of Ukrainian nationalists, while obscuring the reality of martial law in a country that, among other things, has barred men and trans women between the ages of 18 and 60 from leaving "in an attempt to force the country to defend itself." Put another way, ally politics obscure the struggles within struggles – struggles that, unlike the war between Ukraine and Russia, have liberatory potential.

One struggle that has been sidelined by the fetishizing of militancy in the form of state-backed militias is the struggle at the borders of Ukraine. As millions of displaced people flee the country, the situation opens a strategic opportunity to attack border enforcement systems and infrastructure, build solidarity structures (as some anarchists already have) that offer transport, shelter, and assistance to refugees, as well as to other migrants, and fight for the principles of anti-racism/anti-fascism throughout this process. The consequences of the war between Russia and Ukraine will be international. They will literally traverse (many) borders. Now is the perfect time for anarchists to intervene at these chokepoints of social control, while the bulk of the military is occupied elsewhere and masses of people seeking asylum bottleneck at these arbitrary dividers and threaten to explode them.

Minimizing Fascists: "There Are Fascists on All Sides"

Fascism is a revolutionary form of right-wing populism, inspired by a totalitarian vision of collective rebirth, that challenges capitalist political and cultural power while promoting economic and social hierarchy.

– Matthew N. Lyons

In 2018, Greg Johnson, editor-in-chief of the US based, white nationalist publishing house Counter-Currents, opened his presentation at the Second Paneuropa Conference in Kyiv by commenting on what he saw happening in Ukraine:

“I see that you are actually building an alternative social order here, an alternative society, and that’s what we all need to be doing in all white countries. We need to have some kind of organizational nucleus that can demonstrate it can do all the things necessary to secure a society’s future because that will give us the ability to actually take power someday, and I think that that process is most far along in this country, and that’s what’s most impressive to me.”

Johnson is far from alone in his admiration. Since the Maidan Revolution in 2014, the successes of far right nationalists in Ukraine have been an inspiration for many far right individuals and groups, including Christchurch shooter Brentan Terrant, Atomwaffen Division, The Base, and the Rise Above Movement, and the country has become a “tourist mecca” for fascists and neo-Nazis from all over the world.

For those of us who have been in life or death conflicts with “American” neo-Nazis who have traveled to Ukraine to train, it has been infuriating to see the contortions that some anarchists will twist themselves into to downplay the dominance of fascists and neo-Nazis there. Ukraine’s far right movement has been institutionalized within Ukrainian government. Neo-Nazi battalions have been incorporated, fully intact, into the country’s armed forces. Fascist militias have formed street patrols contracted by municipal governments in the capital and other major cities. Former leaders and members of neo-Nazi militias and paramilitary groups have established themselves as “civic activists,” taking advantage of the liberal obsession with abstract “human rights” discourse to make

inroads into Ukraine’s “third sector” as a legitimate interest group. With its access to weapons, infrastructure built up over many years, and various sources of private, state, and city funding, the Ukrainian far right’s formal (but not total) integration with the state affords it power and influence unrivaled in the context of the global far right.

That Ukraine’s far right has gained little in terms of parliamentary representation belies the movement’s growing presence and power, not only within organs of the state, but also in the streets. As Volodymyr Ishchenko, a sociologist at Kyiv’s Polytechnic Institute, has said: “Electorally they are weak, but in extra-parliamentary terms, they are among the strongest groups in civil society. The far right dominates the street. They have the strongest street movement in Europe.” The significance of this street dominance should be clear to anarchists and anti-racists/anti-fascists in the US. The threat of it certainly was to CrimethInc. in 2014 when, reporting on the Euromaidan in “The Ukrainian Revolution and the Future of Social Movements,” the publishing project described the revolution’s front lines as “dominated by fascists, who attacked anarchists and feminists when they tried to organize under their own banners.” In other words, while most of the protesters were not fascists, they didn’t have to be for fascists to emerge dominant and keep anarchists and leftists from participating in the Euromaidan on their own terms.

Familiar with the radical potential of extra-parliamentary politics, anarchists and anti-racists/anti-fascists in the US know the power, as well as the danger, of intervening at the level of the street. As dangerous as it’s been, it could always get more dangerous, as it has for many in Ukraine since 2014. Anarchist and leftist organizing was curtailed by armed far right groups not only during the Euromaidan, but afterwards as well: far right violence against anarchists, anti-fascists, feminists and LGBTQ activists became commonplace, limiting their ability to organize. Pogroms against the country’s Roma community by neo-Nazi and other far right groups