The Betrayal of Donbas; No War But Class War

Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement

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perpetuate war and create a world where no one is sacrificed for the interests of the powerful.

The suffering in this war is a reminder that wars between states are never fought in the interests of the people. Our solidarity lies not with flags or governments but with the working class, the oppressed, and those who resist the violence of the state in all its forms.

avoid fighting. In Ukraine, there are also those who question the government's militarism and oppose being used as pawns in a larger imperialist struggle. These voices must be amplified.

3. **Reject NATO and Western imperialism** – The expansion of NATO has only escalated tensions in Eastern Europe, serving the interests of Western capitalists and military-industrial complexes. Anarchists must oppose NATO's role in fuelling the conflict and reject any calls for military intervention under the guise of "liberation."

4. **Promote international class solidarity** – The working classes of Russia, Ukraine, Donbas, and the West share a common enemy: the global capitalist system. Building international solidarity through strikes, direct action, and mutual aid is the only way to challenge the systems of oppression that perpetuate war.

The Betrayal of Donbas and the Path Forward

The war is not a struggle for freedom or democracy—it is a brutal conflict driven by nationalism, imperialism, and capitalist interests. The people of Donbas have been betrayed by all sides: manipulated by Russia, bombarded by Ukraine, and ignored by the West.

For anarchists, the only just position is one of revolutionary defeatism. We must reject all calls for nationalist solidarity and recognise that the true enemy is not the people of another nation but the capitalist class and state structures that exploit us all.

The slogan *No War but Class War* is not just rhetoric—it is a call to action. It demands that we oppose all forms of imperialism, resist militarisation, and build international solidarity among workers. Only through class struggle can we dismantle the systems that

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Putin's imperialist agenda, which exploits nationalism to justify authoritarianism and economic inequality.

In the context of Donbas, revolutionary defeatism requires solidarity with all working-class people affected by the conflict—regardless of nationality. It means supporting grassroots mutual aid networks, opposing military conscription, and standing with those who resist the war machine on both sides. It also means rejecting NATO and Western imperialism, which have fuelled the conflict for their own geopolitical gain.

No War but Class War—Solidarity with the People of Donbas

The true tragedy of the war is that it has crushed the working class between two competing systems of power. The people of Donetsk and Luhansk have been bombarded by Ukrainian forces, manipulated by Russian imperialism, and ignored by Western powers who see them as expendable in a larger geopolitical game.

The anarchist response must be clear: *No war but class war.* This means rejecting all forms of nationalism and state power, recognising that neither Russia nor Ukraine represents the interests of ordinary people. The only way forward is through international solidarity and class struggle.

1. **Solidarity with workers in Donbas** – The working-class communities in Donbas have been devastated by war. Anarchists should support grassroots efforts to provide humanitarian aid, rebuild communities, and promote worker-led initiatives that reject both Ukrainian nationalism and Russian imperialism.

2. **Support for anti-war movements in Russia and Ukraine** – Thousands of Russians have resisted conscription, engaged in acts of sabotage, and fled the country to

and destabilising Ukraine's Western ambitions. The annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk were part of a broader imperialist strategy designed to undermine NATO's expansion and secure Russia's regional dominance.

For anarchists, this underscores the reality that Russian imperialism is no less oppressive than Western imperialism. The Russian state, like any state, serves the interests of a ruling elite. Its involvement in Donbas was never about the liberation of the working class but about power, control, and expanding capitalist interests under the guise of protecting ethnic Russians.

The people of Donbas, who initially rose in protest against Ukrainian nationalist policies, were ultimately betrayed by both Moscow and Kyiv. Instead of finding solidarity, they were manipulated into serving the interests of two competing state powers, with no regard for their autonomy, freedom, or well-being.

Revolutionary Defeatism—The Anarchist Response to the Ukraine War

In the face of this brutal conflict, anarchists must reject any attempt to side with either Russia or Ukraine. The war in Ukraine illustrates the failure of nationalism and state power to serve the interests of ordinary people. From an anarcho-communist perspective, revolutionary defeatism offers the only principled response.

Revolutionary defeatism means opposing your own ruling class during times of war and refusing to support the imperialist ambitions of any state. This approach recognises that the true enemy of the working class is not the people of another nation but their own government, which seeks to exploit them for profit and power.

For Ukrainian workers, revolutionary defeatism means rejecting nationalist calls to die for a state that suppresses workers' rights, collaborates with Western imperialism, and militarises society. For Russian workers, it means refusing to fight for

The war between Russia and Ukraine is often presented as a clear-cut narrative of imperial aggression versus national defence. In mainstream discourse, Russia is portrayed as the sole aggressor, with Ukraine as a victim bravely defending its sovereignty. However, this oversimplified framing serves the interests of Western imperialism, NATO expansionism, and global capitalist powers, while conveniently ignoring the complexities of the conflict—particularly the long-standing tensions in the Donbas region.

From an anarcho-communist perspective, the story is not about good versus evil states but about imperialism, nationalism, and the manipulation of working-class people by ruling elites. A more nuanced analysis recognises that the seeds of this war were planted long before the 2022 invasion, especially in the political and military developments following the 2014 Maidan uprising and the subsequent conflict in Donbas.

Acknowledging that Ukraine played a role in escalating this conflict—particularly through its actions in Donbas—does not justify Russian imperialism. Instead, anarchists must reject both Russian and Ukrainian state violence, embracing revolutionary defeatism. In this war, as in all wars between states, the true enemy is not the "other" nation but the capitalist class and state structures that profit from bloodshed. Our rallying cry must remain: *No War but Class War*.

The Donbas Conflict—Roots of the War

To understand the origins of the war, it's essential to focus on the Donbas region—an industrial heartland in eastern Ukraine, home to a significant Russian-speaking population. Following the 2014 Maidan uprising, which overthrew Ukraine's pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, the new government in Kyiv moved toward stronger alignment with Western powers and NATO. This shift triggered deep political and cultural tensions in

Donbas, where many felt alienated by the central government's increasingly nationalist policies.

The Ukrainian government's actions following Maidan were perceived by many in Donbas as oppressive. Efforts to suppress Russian language rights, promote nationalist narratives, and sideline the region's economic interests deepened resentment. This was compounded by Kyiv's decision to launch a military operation against separatists in Donbas, known as the *Anti-Terrorist Operation* (ATO). While the separatist movements were undoubtedly supported and exploited by Russia, it is equally true that their emergence was fuelled by real grievances and fears of cultural erasure and economic marginalisation.

The war in Donbas quickly turned into a brutal conflict, with both Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists committing human rights violations. Entire cities were devastated, thousands of civilians were killed, and the working class on both sides bore the brunt of the violence. The people of Donbas became pawns in a geopolitical struggle between Ukrainian nationalism, Russian imperialism, and Western capitalist interests.

From an anarchist perspective, this conflict reveals the failures of both nationalism and state power. The people of Donbas were not fighting for liberation but caught between two oppressive systems—each using their suffering to justify their own political goals.

Ukraine's Role in Escalating the Conflict

Mainstream narratives often ignore Ukraine's role in escalating the war, particularly through its military actions in Donbas and policies that alienated the region's Russian-speaking population. Following the 2014 revolution, the Ukrainian government pursued a nationalist agenda that included laws restricting the use of the Russian language and glorifying nationalist figures with historical ties to fascist movements.

While these actions were framed as moves toward national unity and decommunisation, they were experienced in Donbas as cultural aggression. The central government's refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue with the separatist regions and the imposition of military solutions over political negotiations exacerbated the crisis.

The Ukrainian military campaign in Donbas was brutal and indiscriminate, with reports of shelling civilian areas, enforced disappearances, and abuses by nationalist militias integrated into the armed forces, such as the Azov Battalion. These actions alienated not just pro-Russian separatists but also many ordinary working-class people in the region who wanted peace but found themselves caught between Kyiv's aggression and Russia's opportunism.

Acknowledging these facts doesn't absolve Russia of responsibility, nor does it imply support for its imperial ambitions. Instead, it highlights the reality that both the Ukrainian and Russian states have used the people of Donbas as tools in their struggle for regional dominance.

Russian Imperialism and the Manipulation of Donbas

While acknowledging Ukraine's role in escalating tensions, it is equally important to recognise Russia's cynical manipulation of the Donbas conflict. From the very beginning, the Kremlin used the genuine grievances of the region's people as a pretext for intervention. Russia's support for separatist movements, including the provision of weapons, funding, and military personnel, was not an act of solidarity but a calculated geopolitical strategy.

Russia's interest in Donbas was never about protecting Russian-speaking civilians but about maintaining its sphere of influence