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Confession of the Ukrainian marxist soldier

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Eugene Leshan — one of those Kiev «office» left, who last winter, after certain hesitations accepted the Maidan, and in the spring took a take a strong position against the reaction in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine. This position led him eventually to the Ukrainian armed forces, and Eugene participated in the ATO in Donbass. Found out about this, the Nihilist decided to ask him a few questions.

How did you get into the army? What kind of military unit is this?

The most common military unit is the 72nd separate mechanized brigade. The one that was surrounded in Izvarino in July — it was then constantly bombarded, it suffered heavy losses in manpower and technology, and four hundred of its fighters had to retreat to the territory of Russia — there was a lot of noise in the press. Then the Ukrainian troops took Saur-Grave, which allowed to unlock the surrounded brigade and remove it from the ATO. In August-September, near Melitopol we were reinforced by additional soldiers and armored vehicles — then I got into this brigade as an

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operator-gunner Infantry fighting vehicle — they mobilized me in August 2014. Now the team is back in ATO.

Could you evade the draft?

Technically — yes, of course, I could. But in March I went to the military registration and enlistment office and told the military Commissar that the army can count on me. The annexation of Crimea took place, and riots broke out in the Donbass and Kharkov. It was clear to me that a big war was coming, I was sure that the invasion of the Russian army was a matter of the next few weeks. As for me, the Putin regime, Russian occupation and the ideas of the «Russian world» are absolutely unacceptable, so I did not consider it possible to remain an outside observer. Subsequently, everything developed a little differently than I expected, instead of the invasion of regular troops, Putin initially used the local paramilitary forces, but the essence of the situation did not change. Of course, many colleagues, friends and acquaintances offered «help» — book a ticket, hide from Kiev, including abroad, to issue a visa, etc. But I did not consider these options in principle.

Do you characterize yourself as a leftist and a Marxist?

It is in my belief, of course, yes. However, if we accept the view that Marxism is primarily a political practice, then I can be reproached for not being a Marxist by this criterion. I do not argue with this, I will simply ask whether the Bolsheviks were Marxists when they defended Kerensky's government from the Kornilov putsch.

As a Marxist, I realize that the Ukrainian state today is a little sympathetic piece. It has very strong right-wing conservative and nationalist tendencies, power is still in the hands of big capital, there is a powerful attack on the social component, on the labor rights of citizens. But you know, as in socialist realism, the priority was to reflect the conflict between good and «even better», so today in Donbass there is a conflict between the bad and even worse. In Russia, the right conservatism with authoritarianism is not a trend, but a well-established reality. The new expansionism with

Putin's regime turn out to be loyal to Putin on a subject of Ukraine. Fortunately, not all Russian left are the same, but ...

What do we have to do?

Closely observe. In any case, do not lock yourself in an ivory tower — on the contrary, be in the thick of things, as close as possible to people. Actually, this is another reason why I joined Ukrainian armed forces. We have to feel how the people of Ukraine live and breath, otherwise we will not be able to formulate any effective strategy, and tactics too. Very difficult times are coming. Right-wing consensus in society, combined with an unsolved social agenda, is fraught with a fascist putsch. This danger should be realized and ready for it. Educate the masses, propose solutions to social conflicts based on the class approach, and this decision should be more effective than what the right national-social populism offers. Well, I got to abstraction again. Let's finish the war, and then revisit the subject in more detail, ok?

oriented mass left movement hasn't simply formed. Consider the Soviet-conservative CPU or the pale-pink bourgeois socialists to be left. Not bloody likely! Not to mention commercial and technological projects like the «Borotba» has, which were originally were created for the solution of completely non-left tasks. And the leftists who really tried to solve the current problems, couldn't deal with their own organizational impotence, or were in demand in specific situations — like the «Direct action » («Pryama diya», anarchist student trade-union) for example — and could not fulfill themselves outside of these situations.

Has your attitude to the Western and Russian left changed?

I can't say it's changed, maybe has been finally formed. In the west, the leftists have either rational conformism or dogmatism - and more often a combination of these two not really good characteristics. They are more or less successfully in solving their internal tasks, but their attitude to Ukraine is influenced by the biased understanding of the Ukrainian situation relating the traditional dogma and the «expert» opinion of their Ukrainian contacts, which are often extremely unfair in presenting and analyzing Ukrainian events. As a result, many Western leftists are confident that there is the socialist revolution in Donbass and Ukraine is a fascist state, that at the behest of Washington, is drowning in the blood of a people's uprising. It is extremely difficult to convince them, it is often impossible. Therefore, in my opinion, it is easier and more correct to live as if there are no Western leftists.

As for the Russian left, many of them are still charmed by the «Soviet socialism» that kicked the bucket and «a great victory over fascism». And the Soviet Union has not existed for a long time, and in the Kremlin there aren't all those people who defeated Fascism in 1945, and Bandera with Shukhevych (commanders of far-right Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists during 30–40's) don't rule in Kiev — but the matrix works, and people who violently hate

the «Russian world» dressing is a disgusting reactionary ideology, which in reality results in wars, violence, lies and hatred. And all this is alive and well in Donbass and try to stay. To stop this, in my opinion, is a priority. Returning to the analogy with Kornilovism, I remember that one of my good acquaintances, a socialist, says that now there is a war between the Petlyuraites (followers of the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian People's Republic Simon Petliura in 1918–1920) and the Great Russian White Guards. The analogy is poor, but in conditions when there is no communist party in the war, as for me, as a Marxist, the choice between the Great Russian White Guards and the Petlyuraites is obvious, in favor of the latter. At the same time, it is clear that we are not even allies, but fellow travelers, until we get to the first traffic light.

How do you see the Maidan? What is it?

The Maidan is a very complex topic. On the one hand, a popular uprising, the experience of self-organization of the masses, which was later embodied in the formation of volunteer battalions and a powerful, effective volunteer network, and on the other — a right-wing political wrap. My attitude towards the Maidan changed from cautious neutrality towards critical support, based on the infamous «laws of January 16». In any case, even a very right-wing agenda could not yet discredit the powerful democratic component of the Maidan — and this, in my opinion, is sufficient reason to pay tribute to it. But anyway, Maidan is already past, we live in the era after the Maidan, and now this mix of progress and reaction, that takes place on Maidan, is stratified into its original components. But it's good, it will be easier to weed out the fakes.

What does this war mean to you?

First of all, this is a huge tragedy for millions of people — sorry for the banality. The peaceful population is misinformed, deceived, and terrorized by both sides. In those rare cases when local residents manage to conduct a dialogue, the majority asks: «why did you come to our land with weapons?» When you answer: «in order to not let separatists and Putin's soldiers come armed with

weapons to our land», and they don't take it seriously. I mean it. This war has many aspects, and I perfectly see the political benefits of the Ukrainian and Russian elites from this war, the benefits built on the deaths of the local population, Ukrainian and Russian soldiers. Personally for me, phantoms like territorial integrity and national statehood do not matter, and I do not think it's worth paying for it with blood and life.

But if you lay down your arms, the war will not disappear — just imperialist Russia will continue its bloody expansion. This is aggression, and the aggressor must be stopped, not cajoled. Unfortunately, there is no good solution — there is a choice between bad and very bad.

Why do Ukrainian soldiers fight in the East?

Everyone is at war for his own. For example, my colleague, the romantic nationalist Sanya, who participated at Maidan, also fought for the Motherland, to make the everlasting dream of the Ukrainian people for independence come true. Strong peasant Misha — to not let someone from behind the borders make him, his children and grandchildren feel preached at about how they should live their lives. And the electrician Sergey is at war, because he was mobilized, and very dissatisfied with this fact, and also the military commissar personally sent him to the «slaughterhouse», and not someone who is more suitable. However, he doesn't mind performing the military tasks with dignity. Some men don't hide they are fighting for money — poverty and unemployment in their cities make participation in the war an acceptable alternative for many people. In the majority, soldiers are confident that they are fighting for Ukraine, for its territorial integrity, for the right to live not at the behest of the Kremlin, to stop the «Donetsk bandits» and «commies» trying to rule the country. This is the main motivation.

It turns out that the soldiers are anti-communists and this is a mass phenomenon. How can you explain this?

There is a great temptation to dump all responsibility on the Communist party of Ukraine. In fact, Petro Symonenko's party did everything possible to make the word «communist» become abusive in Ukraine. Long-term service of the interests of the capitalists under reactionary soviet rhetoric, and in the last year also the explicit support of the military adversary — they can't get away with it. However, it's not just the CPU. Many soldiers and officers' ancestors were victims of Stalin reprisals or were lost during holodomor. For each of these soldiers, these phenomena are not an abstraction, not historical events, but a tragedy that touched his family directly, a crime committed by Soviet power. And the propaganda machine of the Ukrainian state has been talking shit successfully for two decades, about mass hunger, violence and executions are the core of all communism. It's not surprising, people easily accept this as their own point of view.

Does the communist feel cozy in this situation?

Of course not. But there is a very good principle: do not cry, do not laugh, but understand. Keep your head cold. It should be noted that hatred of communism in the soldier masses is not hatred for the ideas of justice, cooperation, solidarity and freedom — but, on the contrary, hatred of the social parasitism inherent in Communist party hierarchs, hatred of total physical, ideological and economic violence. And that it is fully compatible that the new post-maidan authority has a great aversion to it. For most of the soldiers, Poroshenko, Yatsenyuk and Klitschko are no better than Yanukovich. No one canceled the social agenda. Of course, the ultra-right ones try to speculate on it today, but this is because the leftists in Ukraine are not able to play even on their traditional political field.

Why did the Left lose in Ukraine?

Difficult question. Now I will say a lot of common words about a combination of many subjective and objective factors. By the way, have you ever seen the victory of the Left in the era of the initial accumulation and redistribution of capital? The present class-