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“Reviving class analysis and politics”

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The Russia-Ukraine war has undoubtedly fractured the anarchist movement, reflecting broader transformations within contemporary anarchism and leftist politics. Over the last half-century, anarchists, and the radical left in general, have witnessed the erosion of their once-distinct class base. This shift has not only profoundly affected their theoretical frameworks – the shift from broadly Marxian class theories to a broadly Foucauldian post-structuralism – but has also hindered their capacity to effectively analyze and respond to current international events. Instead of engaging in strategic hegemonic politics, they often find themselves navigating the fluid terrain of hyperpolitics, characterized by extreme politicization but with limited political consequences, as recently articulated by Anton Jäger.¹

One consequence of this evolving landscape is the challenge that anarchists and the broader left face in comprehending the material underpinnings of the Russia-Ukraine war. Fundamentally,

¹ Anton Jäger, *Hyperpolitik: Extreme Politisierung ohne politische Folgen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2023).

the war arises from a class conflict between post-Soviet political capitalists on one side and the professional middle-class aligned with transnational capital on the other.² The working class, in this conflict, is divided and lacks an independent ideological articulation and political representation. The arguments regarding the war prevailing among the radical left tend to be idealistic and superficial, built on crude notions of imperialism.

These simplistic references extend to classical debates about supporting national liberation movements, often leading to ahistorical and even obscurantist comparisons between the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Third World national liberation struggles. Unlike the latter, which were tightly intertwined with processes of social revolution and modernization, possessed universal appeal (for example, Cuba and Vietnam), and were based on class alliances involving peasantry, workers, revolutionary intelligentsia, and national bourgeoisie, contemporary Ukraine lacks these elements. It lacks the social-revolutionary momentum that could challenge the dominant capitalist order, primarily striving for a comprador peripheralizing integration instead of developmental modernization, all grounded in a fundamentally different class alliance and articulating not universalist ideologies but particularistic nationalist identity politics (Ishchenko, 2022b).³

In light of drastically transformed material circumstances, the national question within anarchism and contemporary leftist theory and strategy needs to be reevaluated. The uncritical celebration of “self-determination”, “subjectivity”, and “agency”, divorced from

² Volodymyr Ishchenko, “Behind Russia’s War Is Thirty Years of Post-Soviet Class Conflict”, *Jacobin*, October 3, 2022, jacobin.com; Volodymyr Ishchenko, “The Minsk Accords and the Political Weakness of the ‘Other Ukraine’”, *Russian Politics* 8, no. 2 (2023), pp. 127–146, doi.org; Volodymyr Ishchenko, “Class or regional cleavage? The Russian invasion and Ukraine’s ‘East/West’ divide”, *European Societies* (2023), doi.org.

³ Volodymyr Ishchenko, “Ukrainian Voices?”, *New Left Review*, no. 138 (2022), pp. 1–10, newleftreview.org.

materialist analysis and class politics, and pursued to its logical extreme, is indistinguishable from the fringe right-wing utopias, such as far-right national-anarchism or libertarian anarcho-capitalism. In the current conjecture, this has resulted in a disconcerting lack of criticism, particularly concerning the ethnonationalist transformation of the contemporary Ukrainian state and society. The international community’s failure to intervene in the complete ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, largely overlooked by the left, serves as a stark reminder of the potential future if military reconquest were to occur in Crimea and Donbas, further underscoring the moral and political bankruptcy of these ideas.

Similarly, an abstract and superficial analysis is evident on the opposite side of the divide in the radical left, particularly in their unqualified rejection of weapon supplies without consideration of their possible use. For instance, this includes the vital need for anti-air defense systems to protect Ukrainian civilian infrastructure and lives.

Especially from anarchists, one might expect a greater ability to differentiate between support for the Ukrainian population and support for the Ukrainian state and its comprador elite. It would be necessary to have a more nuanced stance on the weapons question, a more articulated and coherent opposition to ethnonationalist assimilationist policies regardless of the side implementing them, and greater sensitivity to the diversity of Ukrainian society, divided by frontline and borders. Reviving class analysis and politics is pivotal for anarchists and the radical left to provide more appropriate responses to the international conflicts in the coming decades of geopolitical strife.