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What can Russians do to prevent war?

A short guide for revolutionaries

Dmitry Mrachnik

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A big war is coming. While Russia sets up offensive military formations on the border, groups within Russia — from cynical propagandists to sincere revolutionaries — are trying to explain via Russian social media networks how to approach the topic, and what can be done to avoid disaster. For the propagandists, everything is clear with the propagandists — there is nothing to ask of them, their job is to lie, incite hatred, and drive people to frenzy and bigotry. Appeals to conscience or ideology are worthless — they have nothing to do with logic. The propagandist can be left-wing, maybe right-wing — it makes no difference, as regardless, they believe in nothing and enjoy spreading their lies.

But it's a different story for the sincere revolutionaries. Since there is no political pluralism in Russia, revolutionaries have to either live underground or voluntarily castrate themselves for the right to go online and spread their heroic narratives to society, which has no practical effect and therefore has no value.

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I have the deepest respect for any clandestine Russian revolutionary. I mean — if I knew that they existed. But that doesn't seem to be the case. The last ones I heard about were the Chechens, who started a fire in Grozny as soon as Ramzan Kadyrov left the city. It was quite recently, and I hope not all of them were killed. But Russia is big, and Grozny is not Moscow, so there is no need to rely on the soldiers of free Ichkeria.

But someone has to «derail the trains» so to speak, spoil the cannons and strangle the commanders. There must be thousands of such people for a resistance to have any weight. Castrated revolutionaries are not suitable for this role while they cannot even speak out loud about sabotage. They seem to be hinting, winking at us between the lines, writing pages of texts that do not carry any meaning, because it is all cut out — otherwise in Russia they can be put in jail.

For example, Russian anarchists a couple of years ago issued a memetic plan to end the war with Ukraine. It was about an «anarchist solution» for the statuses of Crimea and Donbas, that is, the anarchists offered to close their eyes and dream about all the soldiers that would turn their guns against their commanders, and then fraternize with former enemies and throw off each of their political leaders. Then peace would reign, and the inhabitants of the occupied parts of Ukraine would not even have to choose which state to belong to — there are no more states, anarchy achieved.

This, of course, is a complete degradation of anarchist ideas, which a hundred years ago were capable of something and even were able to create bright, though not tenacious, political projects. Now anarchism — in particular Russian — is, with a few exceptions, living in a dream world without any hope of victory. It would seem that here it is — a conflict in which you can show the strength and dignity of your beliefs. But this is dangerous and you can end up in prison, therefore, under the guise of anarchism, speculations on abstract topics are offered, while completely the actual events occurring in the physical world.

No matter how bad life is in Ukraine — this is not Russian business.

- The only possible way out of the situation is the complete withdrawal of Russian forces from the territory of Ukraine. Crimea and Donbass must be completely freed from the Russian fleet, military units, garrisons, proxies and clandestine paramilitary. Russia must completely free Ukraine from its violent presence, and the problem of the war will be resolved. It was not Ukrainians who entered Russian territory, killing Russian citizens and establishing their power under the guise of local rebels — it was exactly the opposite.
- Russia would need to pay reparations to compensate for the psychological damage done to the families of dead civilians and soldiers, to restore the destroyed cities and industry of Donbass, and to save the Crimean ecosystem, endangered by Russian attempts to broaden its military bases on the peninsula.
- And of course, like all nation-states, Russia needs to practice the full and unconditional recognition of Ukrainian sovereignty and demonstrate a refusal of further attempts to interfere in Ukraine's internal affairs. Russia may well live dealing only with its own problems — it has a lot of them.

These simple and understandable thoughts should be spread among Russians, as they once were spread among Germans. After the Second World War, Germany covered the damage done to other countries and peoples, and still continues to pay for the crimes of almost a century ago, that is not only acceptable but correct, as Germany is one of the wealthiest, freest and most comfortable countries in the world. Russia should learn from the German post-war example.

Marxists who are not yet drowned in Stalinism have about the same problem, but they are much more susceptible to propaganda than anarchists, and rely on propaganda postulates to construct anti-war programs that interest no one. For example, they won't say that Russia attacked Ukraine, but that a certain conflict is taking place in which both sides are approximately equal to blame. The war started not because the Kremlin wants it, they say. They don't even ask themselves the reasons for the war at all — otherwise they can go to jail. Therefore, they propose simply speaking out for peace and calling all parties to a dialogue.

Another thesis that travels from one text to another is the regular mention of the imperialism of the United States, the European Union and NATO, as if these blocs, not Russia, are killing people in Ukraine, invading cities and establishing military juntas with unidentifiable soldiers. Yes, this is a standard left-wing cliché to make a text look more ideologically correct.

Has Russia attacked Ukraine? Yes, but let's not forget about Western imperialism! Is Russia violating the ceasefire in Donbas? Yes, but the Western imperialists have their own interests in Kyiv! Is Russia pulling troops to the Ukrainian border? Yes, but the Western imperialists are also wrong in something!

I would say that this cliché comes from a lack of meaning, and from the fear of losing leftism by starting to understand the actual facts. , This may seem banal, but I don't think that leftists have to base their speech on clichés, and it is not necessary to perceive politics as long-laid rails, along which one simply needs to push a rusty locomotive.

Leftism is about values, not a set of dogmatic phrases. And the imperialist in relation to Ukraine — in the very sense of the word — is Russia. Because Russia has the economic and geopolitical interest to keep us in its zone of influence, to impose its political will and dictate conditions. If another imperialist begins to open artillery fire on Ukraine, then we will condemn it, but for now, let's deal with what we have: that is, with Russia.

This left-wing nonsense only makes things worse. Instead of reminding the Russians that it was them who greeted the «Russian spring» with their approval and drunken hailing, and then voted for Putin and United Russia, the Russian Marxists relieve the people of any responsibility and propose no revolutions at all. Their anti-war phrase is more like a clip from an exemplary high school newspaper. They offer no plans to destroy the tyrannical regime. Because for this you can go to jail, of course.

One way or another, every active Russian will sooner or later go to prison, regardless of who they are – Liberal, Socialist, Anarchist, Nazi, Anarcho-Capitalist – everyone will go to prison if they too obviously threaten the authorities. Their toothless reactions do not give us any optimism, and just make obvious the fact that we will not find understanding or assistance from them, because these are people for whom the growth of a communal apartment is a higher priority topic than their fellow citizens in green suits, killing other people in a foreign land. This is not a problem, and in general it does not exist.

In my humble opinion, the position of the Russian revolutionaries could have been more conscientious. If they are unable to voice it because of fear of repressions, it can be spread without attribution and thrown into mailboxes in real life or from anonymous online accounts. It's all easy to organize – there are home printers for the first task and online anonymizers for the second. The FSB will not check the postmen. Likewise, the FSB will not be able to identify those responsible for the distribution of texts online if VPN, Tor and virtual phone numbers were used to register mailboxes and social network accounts.

This is quite realizable, but they do not do it, preferring to turn a blind eye to the foreign crimes of their regime. It is a pity, because in this war we will not get any support capable of stabbing the enemy from behind. However, we have been living this way since 2014, and we are still holding on. But the Russians could say the following:

- There is no civil war in Ukraine. There is the cooperation of reactionary Ukrainian politicians with Russia, and Russian pressure in the form of the occupation of Donbas by proxy forces equipped with Russian weapons and backed by regular units of the RF Armed Forces.
- There is no expression of the will of the people of Crimea. There instead is a bashfully veiled occupation, a fake, like all Russian elections, referendum, annexation and repression which stifle any protest voice, not just Ukrainian, but also Crimean Tatar. If someone has doubts about the historical belonging of the peninsula, it is worth listening at least to the opinion of its indigenous people, who are in favor of returning to Ukraine.
- There are no provocations «on both sides» – there is a huge Russia with an advanced and well-equipped army, trained in many wars, and a small Ukraine, which began developing its armed forces literally to the accompaniment of enemy cannonades.
- There is no discrimination against the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine – there are fakes, disinformation, propaganda and a scratch-build incitement to hatred. Most Ukrainians know the Russian language and use it in their daily lives. Even if the Russian speakers were a completely marginalized minority, they would still have a big and wealthy Russia ready to accept them. Ukrainians have no other Ukraine.
- Only one side is to blame for the current escalation – the Russian side, which is pulling troops to the border, showing what will happen to Ukraine if it continues to dare to practice its right to political self-determination and self-defense.