

Interview with Denys Pankratov, organizer of the Crane Operators Union of the Lviv Region – Ukraine

Comrades from the Polish trade union OZZ IP, a member of the International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles give a voice to trade unionists from Ukraine

Ignacy Józwiak

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We met Denys and members of the Crane Operators Union in spring 2021, during online meetings and exchange of experience between unionised operators in Poland and Ukraine. At the time, protests were underway in both countries over pay rises and improved workplace safety in this sector. Ukrainian operators regularly informed about our actions and expressed solidarity in their social media. We wrote about the struggle of Ukrainian operators in the IP Bulletin and on our website, while the materials on Polish operators appeared on the website of the Ukrainian Social Movement organization.

Denys, first of all, tell us what the situation in Lviv is [Western Ukraine] now?

The situation in Lviv is relatively calm. There have been only two alarms in the last two days. There have been no provocations, no explosions and no armed actions in the Lviv area. People are organising themselves, strong voluntary networks are forming. The authorities are also involved, but there are also grassroots initiatives that operate independently from the authorities. Public transport works, as do the shops. Fortunately, there are still some groceries in the shops. What is missing in Lviv are medical supplies, power banks, phone chargers. There is a lack of such critical items and military supplies.

So, tell us about these grassroots initiatives, how do they work, what specifically do you do in Lviv?

The grassroots, anti-authoritarian initiatives that I belong to include preparing vegetarian food. From the morning we cook food for 50–60 to 80 people. First, we distribute it to the places where the refugees are relocated, then we cook or take what is left over and take it to the train station, where there are now many people. I will give you the contact for this initiative, people are working openly there. Apart from that, there are three people from the Social Movement organization, I am also one of those people. We try to support our comrades from the Anti-Authoritarian Union who have gone to the front. We try to give them medical supplies and tactical equipment:

bulletproof vests, helmets, gloves. There is also the anarchist organisation called Black Banner. As far as I know, some of them went to the front, to Kiev, where they joined territorial defence. Others signed up for local territorial defence in Lviv. Nevertheless, the Ecological Platform and the Black Banner still feed people on Saturdays. The homeless and others in need of food.

And the trade union of crane operators, with which you are associated?

We stay in touch all the time; we organised a fundraising for the Ukrainian army. From the union's budget and with our own efforts, we are also helping one union member who was mobilised to the front line. He worked as a mechanic, and now we are helping him to collect various necessary equipment and medical supplies. In the near future, some of the trade unionists will go to Kyiv to help people defend the city.

And what is the general situation of working people in Ukraine now, under these war conditions, if such a question can be posed?

In general, people have received their wages, although I have heard of more than one case where they did not receive them and were left with nothing. Of course, construction sites are not working now. Now all forces are directed towards supporting the defence potential of the city, the region and Ukraine.

And what would you like to say to people from trade unions and social organisations in Poland and in other countries?

We have a concrete request from the Social Movement for the cancellation of Ukraine's foreign debt, there is a petition on this issue. The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine has asked the International Trade Union Confederation to exclude the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, which openly supported Putin's aggression against Ukraine. The Federation also donated its infrastructure, in those cities where this was possible, to the refugees. I mean hotels, tourist bases and the like. A lot of people are now going abroad, these are women, because men are not allowed to leave. We hope that the trade unions will help them to find work and organise their lives.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Follow what's happening here and spread the word. I hope that you will have enough strength in Poland to take care of the Ukrainian working people.

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