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Ukraine between US/EU and Russian Imperialism

by Michael Pröbsting



Cartoon by Carlos Latuff

WORKERS AND OPPRESSED UNITE!

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THE UPRISING IN EAST UKRAINE AND RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

An Analysis of Recent Developments in the Ukrainian Civil War and their Consequences for Revolutionary Tactics

By Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 22.October 2014

INTRODUCTION

Recent political and military developments in east Ukraine, which have led to the present stalemate and ceasefire, raise the question of whether a new situation has been created. Specifically, has the legitimate popular insurrection which started in March – after the reactionary overthrow of the Yanukovich government by pro-US/EU right-wing forces – been transformed into a tool of Russian imperialist foreign policy?

This issue is important for several reasons. First, the uprising in east Ukraine was a significant reaction against the right-wing offensive of the Maidan movement which ultimately took power on 23 February 2014. This marked the first time since 1945 that fascist forces have become part of a government in Europe. Hence, the uprising was an important reaction to such a historic event.

Second, the uprising marked the beginning of a lengthy civil war in Europe's largest country geographically and the continent's sixth most populated country (if we exclude Russia which spans two continents – Europe and Asia).

Third, this conflict marked a turning point in the inter-imperialist rivalry between Russia (and its allies) and the great Western powers. It opened a period of escalating threats and sanctions from the US and the EU against Russia (as well as counter-sanctions by Moscow) and led to the annexion of the Crimea and the de-facto annexion of significant parts of Donbass by Russia.

For the above reasons, in various statements and theoretical publications the RCIT has analyzed the nature of the current political crisis in the Ukraine as well of the inter-imperialist rivalry between the great Western and Eastern powers behind it. ¹ In order to continue our serious and concrete analysis of the Ukrainian civil war, we must reinvestigate the situation after the tumultuous events of the past six months.

In this essay we will demonstrate how the uprising in east Ukraine was a progressive and democratic struggle against the reactionary Kiev regime, one which revolutionaries were obliged to support. With this support, the RCIT offered sharp criticism of the petty-bourgeois leadership of the Donbass republics as well as a socialist program for the expropriation of the oligarchs, national self-determination for all minorities, and working class power.

From its start the uprising was hampered by a leadership dominated by Greater Russia chauvinists (including several Russian politicians and militia leaders). These leaders tried to transform the Donbass republics into a territory

controlled by Russian imperialism. However, this process was contradictory because the uprising was a spontaneous movement and remained chaotic and decentralized for a long time. In addition, Russia's ruling class did not follow a consistent line in its foreign policy.

One wing of Russia's monopoly capital – the "Eurasians" who advocate an aggressive foreign policy to expand the Russian empire – vocally advocated full military intervention and supported the uprising as much as they could. The Putin government cautiously supported the uprising and hoped to use it to bargain for a better deal with the new Ukrainian government.

With the Ukrainian army's huge military advances in July/August which brought the Donbass republics close to defeat, the Putin government decided on massive intervention. Moscow replaced the leadership of the "Peoples' Republics" and put in their stead Russian politicians who had previously served as loyal instruments of Moscow. In addition, the Putin government sent into east Ukraine thousands of troops whose presence tipped the military balance and helped the Donbass republics regain substantial ground. In early September, Moscow imposed a ceasefire. Thus, the August intervention of the Russian imperialist state marked a qualitative turning point. While the Eurasian wing of Russia's monopoly bourgeoisie was already strongly influential from early on in the conflict, the real turning point took place in August with the full political and military intervention of the Putin regime.

From that moment, the dominant character of the uprising has been its transformation into a tool of Russian imperialist foreign policy. With this change, revolutionaries should continue the struggle for democratic rights against the austerity attacks of the Kiev regime and against the fascist threat, *without* making a military bloc with the Donbass separatists. In essence, revolutionaries must now pursue a *dual defeatist* position, i.e. wage a struggle on two fronts: against the imperialist bourgeoisie of the US and the EU and their Kiev puppet and, at the same time, against Russian imperialism and their stooges at the top of the Donbass republics. ²

I. THE UPRISING IN THE DONBASS: ITS ORIGIN AND CHARACTER

The civil war in the east was preceded by a reactionary overthrow of Yanukovich's government by the pro-Western Euromaiden movement. This political crisis originated as a conflict between different factions of oligarchs, whose respective orientations reflected the ongoing rivalry between US/EU imperialism on the one hand and Russian imperialism on the other for influence in the country. While the Yanukovich government represented the interests of a reactionary group of oligarchs with a pro-Russian orientation, at no time did the Euromaiden movement display a progressive, democratic nature.

As we noted in a statement at that time, this movement *"was founded, top-down by pro-Western parties, on the very day that President Yanukovich refused to sign the association agreement with the EU. While undoubtedly the movement contained some liberal, middle class elements hoping for more democracy, as a whole it was dominated from start to finish by an unstable coalition of two right-wing conservative parties (Fatherland and UDAR), the fascist Svoboda party, and the Neo-Nazis of the Pravy Sektor. These reactionary elements attacked progressive and trade union forces as soon as the latter openly intervened with flags and banners. In sum, the Maidan movement differed in a number of ways from a democratic mass movement with a non-revolutionary leadership like those which have arisen in other countries: (1) it came into being as a movement supporting a reactionary goal (joining the imperialist EU) instead of, for example, one fighting for democratic rights against a dictatorship; (2) from its emergence until its accession to power, the movement was tightly controlled by a small group of reactionary leaders (including fascists); and (3) the only time the masses identifying with the movement refused to follow its leadership was when the Pravy Sektor Nazis called for the cancellation of the compromise with the Yanukovich government. For these reasons, the RCIT maintains that the dominant character of the Maidan movement was not the desire for democratic rights (while this certainly played an important role among some sectors of the movement); rather we see this movement as having been a reactionary tool which fought for a reactionary goal (joining the EU) and for the interests of a pro-Western sector of the ruling class as well as those of Western imperialism. (...) The overthrow itself was the result of the Pravy Sektor's military initiative following their rejection of the compromise which the other three parties of the Maidan movement signed with the Yanukovich government. (...) However, it would be inaccurate to denounce the present government in Kiev as a "fascist government." Rather, it is a pro-Western coalition government composed of right-wing conservative parties and fascists, the latter being a minority: Svoboda and Pravy Sektor hold eight out of the twenty-seven governmental portfolios, and account for four out of twenty-four regional governorships."*³

From our analysis we drew the conclusion that revolutionaries must not give any support to the reactionary Euro-maiden Movement. At the same time, they could not support the reactionary Yanukovich government.

i) Reactionary Character of the Kiev Regime

The reactionary character of the Kiev regime was subsequently confirmed by its deeds. Soon after taking power it announced a 50% rise in the price of gasoline as well as plans to sack many public sector workers, reflecting its desire to join the European Union (as well as NATO). In fact, one of the driving forces behind its overthrowing of the preceding regime in late February was aggressive pushing on the part of the Western imperialist powers.

The only obstacles for the rapid integration of the Ukraine into both the EU and NATO are the civil war in the east of the country and the determined opposition of Russia. This development came as a surprise to the arrogant leaders of the Western imperialist powers. As the US journal *Foreign Affairs*, a highly prestigious imperialist publication close to the US State Department, commented: *"U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border."*⁴

As a result of the escalating civil war and inter-imperialist rivalry, this has caused a certain hesitance on the part of the ruling circles in the EU and the US. The EU's monopoly bourgeoisie is now reluctant to quickly integrate the Ukraine, not only because of the resistance to this move by the rebels and Russia, but also because it would oblige the West to provide huge financial assistance to a country whose economy is bankrupt. And while NATO is pursuing an aggressive line against Russia, it does not want to light-mindedly provoke the big bear by quickly integrating the latter's largest neighboring country in Europe.

In addition, we have witnessed a tremendous rise of extreme right-wing chauvinist and fascist forces in Kiev. As noted above, the fascists of Svoboda and *Pravy Sektor* got a number of posts in the government after the takeover. According to Borotba Union the fascists of the *Pravy Sektor* took over three ministries – education, anti-corruption, and national security. *Svoboda* got the ministries of defense, prosecutor general, agriculture, and environment. In addition, Svoboda's leader Oleksander Sych became one of three vice prime ministers.⁵

In the presidential elections of 25 May 2014, these parties received only relatively few votes. However, another extreme right-wing chauvinist candidate, Oleh Lyashko, leader of the *Radical Party*, received 8.32% of the vote, ranking him in third place.

Since then the fascists have expanded their forces and their influence. In the current opinion polls for the upcoming parliamentary elections on 26 October, *Pravy Sektor* gets about 1-2% of the votes, *Svoboda* about 5%, and the *Radical Party* between 10-14%.

Lyashko as well as Pravy Sektor leaders have founded the notorious *Azov Battalion*, which is an openly neo-Nazi paramilitary formation. Lyashko and other Azov commanders have released videos, made during the civil war in the east, in which they themselves humiliate and torture

prisoners. Lyashko's *Radical Party* has successfully integrated several leading neo-Nazis members and has placed them as candidates on their electoral list. For example, Asov Battalion's second in command, Ihor Mosiychuk, was elected to Kiev's Municipal Council on the electoral list of Lyashko's *Radical Party*.⁶

However the fascists are also increasing their influence outside the extreme right-wing chauvinist *Radical Party* which itself is moving towards fascism. The *People's Front*, a recently-founded party which split in August from Yulia Tymoshenko's right-wing *Batkivshchyna* party and is led by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and former transitional president Oleksandr Turchynov, is also recruiting fascists for its list of candidates. It has founded a special "military council" to which it has brought, among others, the Azov battalion's commander Andriy Biletsky. Biletsky is also head of two neo-Nazi political groups, the *Patriot of Ukraine* and *Social-National Assembly*.

In addition, they placed Andriy Parubiy in the second slot of the party's list of candidates. Parubiy was a co-founder of the *Social-National Party of Ukraine* which later became *Svoboda*. In 1998-2004 Parubiy led the paramilitary organization of SNPU, the *Patriot of Ukraine*. While he left these organizations in 2004 to make career with Tymoshenko's *Batkivshchyna* party, he kept his convictions and connections with the fascists. During the riots this past spring, he commanded the Euromaidan militia. After the overthrow of the Yanukovich government he was then appointed Secretary of the *National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine*.

Another leading candidate of the *People's Front* list of candidates, in fourth place, is Tetiana Chornovol. In the early 2000s she worked as press secretary for the fascist UNA-UNSO organization. While she later affiliated to *Batkivshchyna*, she kept her views. She became the head of Ukrainian government's National Anti-Corruption Committee, but later resigned and joined the Azov battalion. Chornovol's husband, Mykola Berezovyi, recently died as a volunteer fighter in the Azov Battalion during the fighting in eastern Ukraine.⁷

However, at the same time it is important to recognize that the new regime, while containing fascist elements, is not fascist in its entirety. The fascists are not even the dominant factor in the Kiev government. Hence, when various pro-Russian leftists or Putin advisor Sergei Glazyev – himself a Eurasian right-wing chauvinist – calls Ukraine's President Poroshenko or the whole Ukrainian government as "Nazis" this is simply nonsensical rhetoric.⁸

In fact the Poroshenko is a right-wing neoliberal, pro-US/EU regime which – primarily – represents the oligarchs. In fact, Poroshenko himself is one of the richest oligarchs of the country and is widely known as the *Chocolate King* because of his large-scale confectionery business. His regime has a bonapartist-authoritarian character which is preserving a limited bourgeois democracy. It includes fascists but the latter are not dominant. There are also various conflicts between the government and fascists, as is evidenced by the repeated clashes of fascist demonstrators and the police in front of the Rada in Kiev.

If we take an overall picture of the situation, we can identify four major axes of struggle which characterize what's occurring in the Ukraine since the spring of this year:

a) A national conflict where the Russophone minority in

the east is faced with the treat of discrimination;

b) An antifascist struggle defending democratic rights against the rapidly growing fascist and semi-fascist forces which have gained influence via the Euromaidan movement; however, this struggle is made more complex by the fact that there are also a number of pro-Russian fascist and semi-fascist forces taking part in the Donbass republics;

c) An economic struggle on the backdrop of the massive austerity attacks by the new Poroshenko regime which were dictated by the IMF, US and EU;

d) An inter-imperialist rivalry between the imperialist US/EU powers on one side and Russia (and its allies in the BRICS) on the other.

Naturally these axes of conflict are intermingled and influence each other. Hence it is necessary to update our concrete analysis of the conflict.

ii) Uprising in the East Ukraine: The National Question

In contrast to the Euromaidan movement, as well as the new regime which came to power following the coup in late February, from the start the uprising in the east had a progressive, democratic, and proletarian character. In our statement from 17 April we wrote:

*"We therefore support the popular rebellion of the workers and poor in the east. (...) This movement has a contradictory nature but, overall, it is predominantly democratic, which becomes obvious if one compares it with the Maidan movement: i) The uprising in the east is overwhelmingly proletarian in its class composition in contrast to the Maidan movement. (...) ii) The uprising in the east is much more spontaneous than the Maidan movement was, and is thus a more authentic expression of the popular will. (...) iii) The uprising in the east was launched as a struggle for democratic rights – against the discrimination of the Russian language and against the dominance by the right-wing regime in Kiev, which included fascists. (...) iv) The powerful influence of fascist forces in the Maidan movement ensured that socialist and progressive forces were beaten and expelled as soon as they openly intervened. Contrary to this, socialist forces like Borotba and others are openly intervening in the proletarian uprising in the east and have achieved some influence in the movement."*⁹

We think that subsequent events confirmed this assessment. The uprising was a *spontaneous reaction* to the right-wing takeover in Kiev. Its spontaneous character became obvious by the chaotic and localized process of the uprising. While the Euromaidan movement had a centralized leadership from the start, for a long time the uprising in the east lacked any centralized structures.



It was a democratic uprising because it was driven by the justified fears of the people in the east that they would be discriminated against by the new regime because of the latter's hatred for the Russian-speaking population in the east. This hatred was manifested in one of the new regime's first acts: the abolishing of Russian as an official language. These legitimate fears of oppression were reinforced by the fact that the new regime included a number of open supporters of the Nazi-collaborator in WWII, Stepan Bandera.

The conflict between the Russophone population in the east and the central government in Kiev also reflects the contradictory and incomplete nation-forming of the Ukraine. This becomes obvious in light of the fact that, according to a survey released by the *Donetsk Institute for Social Research and Political Analysis*, "only a third like to identify themselves as "citizens of Ukraine." More prefer "Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine" or "residents of the Donets Basin".¹⁰

Another reflection of the deep division between the people in the east and west of the country is the issue of the political and economic orientation of the country. According to a poll conducted in April by the *Kiev Institute of International Studies*, in the eight, majority Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine (in the east and south of the country) "only 25 percent of respondents favor closer economic ties to Europe. Forty seven percent want closer ties in the opposite direction - with Russia. Eighty percent said that ties between Ukraine and Russia should be friendly and, unlike with other countries, borders should be completely open."¹¹

A poll by the *International Republican Institute*, a right-wing US institute, conducted in March 2014, reached the conclusion that 90% of the residents of Western Ukraine and 70% of those living in Central Ukraine thought that the country should join the EU. On the other hand, only 29% in the south and 20% in the east of the country shared this view. Alternatively, while only a small minority in the western and central parts of the country wanted to join the Eurasian Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the relative respectively absolute majority did so in the Russophone part of the country (37% in the south and 59% in the east).¹² All this reflects that the Ukraine has not become a unified and homogenous nation.

As a side note we draw our readers' attention to the fact that the above does not necessarily mean that all Ukrainians want the country either to ally itself either with the EU/NATO or Russia. According to an opinion poll conducted by *ComRes* for CNN, 37% of residents of the three eastern regions (Donetsk, Lugansk and Kharkov) favor an alliance with Russia, while 14% back an alliance with the European Union and nearly a half (49%) say Ukraine would be better off, if it did not ally with either.¹³ This shows, by the way, that the RCIT's slogan which we promoted from the beginning of the crisis in autumn 2013 – "Neither Brussels nor Moscow! For an independent workers' republic in the Ukraine which guarantees full and equal rights to all national groups!" – could reflect the real sentiment among large sections of Ukrainian working class.

The fact that the Donbass people side with the pro-Russian separatists and against the Kiev regime and hence identify more with the *Ruskiy Mir*¹⁴ than with the Ukrainian state is also reflected by the following. According to an UNHCR report from early August, more than 730,000 Ukrainians have left the country and sought refuge in Russia since

the beginning of the civil war. A further 117,000 people are displaced inside Ukraine. We can assume that a part of those displaced people did seek refuge in the areas controlled by the Peoples' Republics.¹⁵ Another, more recent report from the UN, states that more than 1 million Ukrainians have been displaced by the fighting. About 875,000 people fled to Russia, of which about 300,000 have applied for temporary residence.¹⁶

Since the civil war is localized to the Donbass region in the east, these refugees could potentially have also gone to central or western Ukraine to escape the horrors of war. But the fact that ¾ of a million Donbass Ukrainians fled to Russia instead to other areas of their official "fatherland" (only a few tens of thousands having done so) once again emphasizes that the people in the east identify more with Russia, respectively the *Ruskiy Mir*, than with the Ukrainian state.

There have been many reports about the broad support of the majority of the Donbass people for the rebels. The rebels claim that around 75% of the population participated in the referendum on 11 May of which 89% voted "yes." While it is possible that these figures were exaggerated by the separatist organizers of the referendum, it is undeniable that the huge majority of the population in the Donbass region supported at that time – and still does – the drive towards independence or at least a substantial autonomy where Kiev could no longer interfere. This tremendous support for the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic has even been confirmed by surveys made by major Western bourgeois papers at the time of the referendum.¹⁷ It goes without saying that the popular support for state separation from Kiev was tremendously reinforced after the barbaric massacres perpetrated by the *Pravy Sektor* fascists in Odessa and other places.

In short, all this reflects the complicated process of nation forming in what is called the Ukraine. Historically, this process was characterized by oppression from Moscow and Greater Russian chauvinism (including in its Stalinist version). However, since the Ukraine became independent in 1991, after the collapse of the USSR, the situation for the Russian-speaking minorities in the Ukraine and other countries (like the Baltic States) has changed. Since then, they find themselves more or less discriminated against, which in turn has pushed them to identify with the *Ruskiy Mir*. The recent developments in the Crimea and the Donbass underline how powerful these dynamics are. In the final analysis we see that the Russophone Donbass people have not become an integral part of the Ukrainian nation.

iii) The Uprising in East Ukraine: Proletarian Tendencies

Unsurprisingly, given the fact that the Donbass region is the industrial heartland of the Ukraine, the uprising had a proletarian character from the start. This was manifested in numerous ways.

In contrast to the middle class-dominated Euromaidan movement, the industrial workers collectively came out to oppose the military offensive and support the resistance. On 27 May, *Rabkor* ("Worker Correspondent") site reported: "Coal miners in the Donbass region have declared an indefinite strike, demanding an end to armed operations in the south-east and the withdrawal of Ukrainian government forces from Do-

netsk Province.”¹⁸ The next day, three thousand workers from five different mines marched to Lenin Square in the centre of Donetsk under the slogan “Fascism will not pass!” and were received by the Minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic Boris Litvinov who came out to support the miners.¹⁹

The uprising clashed soon with the interests of the oligarchs. Rinat Akhmetov, one of the richest man in the Ukraine and the owner of coal mines, steel works, and power stations in Donetsk, called on his 300,000 employees to demonstrate against the militants on 20 May. However, despite the huge pressure from management on the workers, according to a correspondent of the British imperialist newspaper *Financial Times* “turnout at the rallies was low and a number of workers in attendance said they supported the insurgents.” The report quoted Vladimir Sadovoy, the head of the factory’s workers’ union: “Ninety-nine per cent of the workers are against the Kiev authorities. (...) Some want to be part of Russia, others want to be part of Ukraine, others want to be independent. But everyone is against the Kiev authorities, absolutely.”²⁰

There have been many more workers’ protests against the Kiev regime. On 18 June, for example, a thousand miners and relatives, from sixteen different mines, demonstrated in Donetsk demanding an end to Kiev’s “anti terrorist op-

eration” and the withdrawal of troops from the Donbas. They shouted slogans like: “Donetsk Republic” and “Donbass – that’s us!”. According to a report, “the main demand of the speakers on the stage was the immediate withdrawal of troops from the Donbass.”²¹

Another example is the call of Mikhail Alexeevich Krylov, a leader of the *Independent Donetsk Miners’ Trade Union*, who was the co-chairman of the City Strike Committee in Donetsk during the big miners’ strikes in 1991 and later on in the 1990s. In an appeal to the international workers movement he stated:

“In Donbas, there is a real war in which civilians are killed: including the elderly, women and children. You are blatantly being lied to that that war is between Ukraine and Russia. But it is not so! The war is between the people and a handful of oligarchs with the support of the EU and U.S. authorities. The tragedy in Ukraine is that, those in power, managed to infect the people with certain fascist ideas. We, the residents of Donbas, fight against all manifestations of Nazism and Fascism. We fight with weapons in hand, for our lives and the lives of our loved ones. We have nowhere to retreat – this is our land! We appeal to you, the workers of the European countries, asking for your help and solidarity: help us break the stronghold of fascism in Ukraine. This will be our common victory!”²²

This proletarian support for the uprising, as well as the



hostility of all oligarchs of the Ukraine, led to a number of anti-capitalist sentiments and demands. As a result, for example, the railway system in Donetsk region was nationalized by the Ministry of Transport of the Donetsk People's Republic.²³ It was also reflected in widespread demands for the nationalizations of the enterprises owned by the Rinat Akhmetov. This was, however, opposed by Alexander Borodai, the prime minister of the Donetsk People's Republic.²⁴

Other expressions of this were various public statements by some leading figures of the People's Republics in Donbass. For example Nikolai Solntsev, a founding father of the Donetsk People's Republic, was quoted by the *New York Times* to be a supporter of the Soviet Union and while the People's Republic had not had time to work out its own economic policy, it would focus on supporting "the working class, not the bourgeoisie."²⁵

At rallies, socialist forces like Borotba could openly intervene and many red flags with the hammer and sickle emblem were visible. However one has to caution against a too rosy picture of such pro-Soviet and pro-socialist

sentiments. In a number of cases, such sentiments were combined with or even entirely replaced by expressions of pro-Russian nostalgia for a time when the „*Russkiy Mir*“ was strong and powerful in the form of the USSR.

Recently a Communist Party of Donbass has been founded. Its leader is Boris Litvinov, Chairman of the DPR Supreme Council and a former local KPU official. However, it immediately demonstrated its arch-Stalinist policy by declaring its support for DPR Prime Minister Alexander Zakharchenko's candidacy in the upcoming elections for premiership.²⁶ In addition, Litvinov calls for the republic to join the *Eurasian Union*, an economic association led by imperialist Russia which also includes Belarus and Kazakhstan.²⁷

Fyodor D. Berezin, a deputy defense minister, is another Stalinist who has a leading position in the government the Donetsk People's Republic. However, as we will see below, these Stalinists don't have any independent role in the People's Republics and integrate themselves in the right-wing Great Russian outlook of the mainstream.²⁸



Source: Wikimedia, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/03/Map_of_Ukraine_en.svg/1280px-Map_of_Ukraine_en.svg.png

II. THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM IN THE DONBASS REPUBLICS

Having enumerated the progressive aspects of the uprising, it is no less important to see its reactionary elements. This is particularly so, given the subsequent degeneration of the Donbass republics into tools of Moscow's foreign policy. From the beginning, the RCIT has warned against the danger to the uprising from reactionary pro-Russian chauvinist forces as well as from interference by Russian imperialism.

*"Recognizing the fundamentally democratic and progressive character of the uprising in the east must not cause socialists to overlook the contradictory and reactionary elements participating in this movement (...). The spontaneous nature of the movement also has the negative consequence that the working class cannot democratically control the movement and its local leaders. As a result, various adventurer and chauvinist bonsai warlords are able to take leading positions in the movement. The movement also contains Great Russian chauvinist and semi-fascist elements, albeit they do not dominate the movement as was the case in the Maidan movement. In addition, openly pro-Russian imperialist forces and agents are trying to influence the movement. The RCIT repeats that Ukraine's subjugation to Russia is in no way better than its subjugation to Western imperialism."*²⁹

Indeed, these reactionary tendencies existed from the beginning of the uprising and only increased during the course of time. Before we elaborate on this more in detail, it is important to elucidate the background of these developments. As we stated above, at the beginning the movement had a very spontaneous character. This was reinforced by the huge political vacuum which existed at that time in the east. President Yanukovich fled the country, his *Party of Regions* simply collapsed and disappeared, and the Communist Party became completely paralyzed after it was "betrayed" by its ally Yanukovich. As a result, there was not a single mass political force which could lead the protests.

The development and ultimate degeneration of the Donbass uprising demonstrates dramatically the devastating consequences of the lack of a revolutionary leadership. If a substantial revolutionary party would have existed in the Ukraine, it could have given the uprising a perspective which would not have been focused in founding Donbass republics, but rather in launching a country-wide struggle: against the reactionary Kiev regime; against the intervention of all imperialist powers; for the equality of all national groups; and for a socialist perspective which aims for the expropriation of all oligarchs, the nationalization of the industries and banks, and a workers' government. However, the lack of any revolutionary party opened the door for right-wing adventurers and Russian chauvinists to take over the leadership of the uprising.

i) Reactionary Greater Russian Chauvinist Leadership of the "Peoples' Republics"

The uprising started with various local protests and the storming of public administration buildings. Soon political obscurantists and adventurers took leadership positions. Examples of this are Denis Pushilin or Pavel Gubarev (a former member of the *Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine* as well as of the neo-Nazi *Russian National Unity*) who proclaimed the *Donetsk People's Republic* (on 7 April) and the *Lugansk People's Republic* (on 27 April).³⁰ From early April onwards a wave of Russian politicians and fighters joined the uprising and – irrespective of their inner conflicts – increasingly centralized and took over the uprising.

This led to a growing influence of extreme Greater Russian chauvinist, reactionary forces. When Pavel Gubarev, leader of the *Donetsk People's Republic*, founded the *Partiya Novorossiya* (New Russia Party) on 22 May, the founding congress was attended by leading figures of Russia's extreme right-wing and fascist camp. The following people participated in the congress:

* Alexander Dugin, advisor to Putin, former supporter of the fascistic *National-Bolshevik Party*, founder of the *Eurasia Party* and leading intellectual of the extreme right-wing and aggressive chauvinist Eurasian movement which includes also leading fascists from Western Europe.³¹

* Alexander Prokhanov, the editor of the extreme Russian chauvinist and anti-Semitic paper *Zavtra*

* Valery Korovin, another right-wing ideologist who writes for *Zavtra*. He too is a supporter of the Eurasian movement because "*the construction of a Eurasian Empire can be the ideology of Russia*".³²

Both Prokhanov and Korovin are members of the notorious right-wing Greater Russian chauvinist *Isborsk Club*.³³ Dugin's thoughts on the goals of the Novorussia state are quoted in the following report: "*Dugin expanded his thoughts on the self-declared state later online, calling it a response by those who "reject the Kyiv-Galician identity" in favor of an "ethno-social" Cossack way of life. The party's purpose is also a rejection of "Jewish oligarchs," "pro-American liberals," and "Catholics, Protestants, and Schismatics."* He also describes an ongoing "*war with liberal Nazis*."³⁴

However, Russian politicians and military did not only play an influential role in the background but also took up leading positions in the Peoples' Republics. Probably the most important figure is Alexander Borodai. He served as prime minister of the *Donetsk People's Republic* and since August as the "first deputy prime minister" (in fact he is the strong man of the government). He is also a right-wing chauvinist who regularly writes for the anti-Semitic Russian newspaper *Zavtra*. He worked for some time as advisor for the Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.

Malofeev is a Russian multimillionaire and founder of the international investment fund *Marshall Capital*. He is a key figure amongst the Russian monopoly capital and has close ties with President Putin. He calls himself a “monarchist” and applauds Putin for being a strong leader. As we showed in our latest publication on Russian imperialism, on 31 May Malofeev sponsored a meeting of European and Russian chauvinist and fascist politicians and intellectuals in Vienna. He was also a key organizer – together with an Orthodox charity and the OAO Russian Railways chief Vladimir Yakunin, a longtime Putin ally – of a conference to defend “family values” which was held in Moscow in September and which was also attended by a number of right-wing and fascist politicians from Europe.³⁵

Other Russians who came to the newly founded Peoples’ Republics and soon played a leading role were Igor Girkin (aka Strelkov), who served as the commander-in-chief of the Peoples’ Republics defense forces until his resignation in mid-August. Strelkov is a right-wing Russian monarchist who claims to have served in the rank of colonel in Russia’s FSB security service until resigning at the end of March. He was active in Russian imperialist interventions in Transdnistria in neighboring Moldova, in the Serbian chauvinist war in Bosnia, as well in Moscow’s two reactionary wars of aggression in Chechnya. Like Borodai he also worked for the oligarch Malofeev.³⁶

Another Russian who took over a leadership position in the Donetsk People’s Republic is Vladimir Antyufeyev who was named “deputy prime minister” by Borodai on 10 July. Like Strelkov he served in the Russian security service in the pro-Russian region of Transdnistria, in Chechnya as well as in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia.

Aleksandr Karaman, former vice president of Transdnistria and partner of Antyufeyev, also arrived and became DPR deputy prime minister for social issues. According to Antyufeyev, Karaman is a protégé of Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who supervises Transdnistria for the Russian government.³⁷ In addition a number of other Russian *siloviki* (security services personnel) have been put in leadership positions during the summer, as we shall see below.

Another Russian politician in the Donbass leadership was Alexander Proselkov who was shot and killed on 31 July. He served as deputy foreign minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic and as an aide to Pavel Gubarev. Proselkov was a member of the fascist *International Eurasia Movement* and *Eurasian Youth Union* which are closely linked with Alexander Dugin’s ultra-nationalist *Eurasia Party*. Other Russian politicians who have been named as leading figures in the Donbass republics are Alexei Khudyakov, former head of the Russian anti-immigration group *Shield Of Moscow*, and Ravil Khalikov and Rostislav Zhuravlev, from Edward Limonov’s “Other Russia’ Party.”³⁸

It is only logical from this composition and their close relations with Russian oligarchs that the leadership of the Donbass republics, in its majority, has an extremely right-wing chauvinist, pro-capitalist, and pro-Russian imperialist character. It is only because of the collaboration of all Ukrainian oligarchs with the new regime in Kiev that Pushilin and others sometimes threatened to nationalize the property of Rinat Akhmetov:

“Enterprises belonging or previously owned by oligarchs who

refuse to co-operate with the DPR and to pay their taxes here, who continue paying them to Ukraine, will be nationalized (...) Those enterprises who clearly stated that the DPR is unacceptable to them – those are Rinat Akhmetov’s enterprises. Naturally, if they do not start co-operating closely with the DPR, then we have no other choice.”³⁹

However, despite the open struggle of Akhmetov against the republic’s leadership, until now his property has not been nationalized.

The bourgeois and pro-capitalist orientation of the Peoples’ Republics leadership is also reflected in their constitutions. For example, the constitution of the Donetsk People’s Republic guarantees the right of private property and states nothing about the socialization of the economy.

“Article 5.1: Private, state, municipal and other forms of property are recognized and equally protected in DPR.”

“Article 28.1.: The right of private property is protected by law.”

“Article 27.1.: Every person has the right to freely use their abilities and property for entrepreneurial and other economic activities not prohibited by the law.”

In addition the constitution lays down the orientation to – or better says the subordination to – the great imperialist power Russia:

“...feeling itself like an integral part of the “Russian World” as Russian civilization ...”

“Article 6.5.: Public authorities in Donetsk People’s Republic while exercising its powers and performing of its duties, fully consider and respect traditional religious, social, cultural and moral values of “Russian World”.”

The reactionary character of the constitution is also expressed in its making the Russian Christian Orthodox faith the official state religion and by open linking of the republic with the Russian Orthodox Church:

“Article 9.2.: In Donetsk People’s Republic leading and dominant belief is the Orthodox faith (Christian Orthodox Catholic faith of Eastern Confession) professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).”

“Article 4.2.: Social policy of Donetsk People’s Republic aims to create conditions, ensuring a decent life and free human development, people’s welfare, access to the main material and spiritual benefits, based on understanding of the traditional religious, social, cultural and moral values.”

This is also reflected by the open suppression of homosexual relations between people.

“Article 31.3.: Any forms of perverted unions between people of the same sex are not acknowledged and not allowed and will be prosecuted in DPR.”⁴⁰

Finally, it is also characteristic of the Greater Russian chauvinist outlook that the leadership of the Peoples’ Republics chose to name their federation *Novorossiya* which was the term for the region in the Russian Empire under the Tsar. The choice of the name *Novorossiya* reflected an important element in the nature of the uprising. The more the Greater Russian chauvinists gained influence, the more they transformed the uprising from a struggle for a democratic, federal Ukraine into one for the secession of the Donbass region from Ukraine and its annexation by imperialist Russia.

The increasingly strong, one might even say dominating, presence of extreme right-wing forces in the leadership of the Donbass republics naturally undermined the antifascist character of the uprising in the east against the Kiev

regime. It increasingly became, instead, primarily a national, Russophone uprising against the threat of the new Ukrainian chauvinist regime.

From this analysis, the RCIT drew tactical conclusions for the period following the beginning of the uprising in March: revolutionaries had to defend the national rights of the Russian-speaking population in the east and south, without giving any support to Russian imperialism. While the mass uprising of sectors of the Russian-speaking population in the east contained contradictory elements, its dominant character was its democratic resistance against the looming oppression by the pro-Western, pro-IMF, Russophobic, and right-wing and fascist regime in Kiev. Therefore, the RCIT supported the popular rebellion in the east and called for its victory against the Kiev-loyalist military forces. At the same time, revolutionaries had to fight inside this movement *against* reactionary, pro-Russian imperialist and chauvinist forces. The overall perspective had and has to be the formation of democratically-controlled action councils and workers' militias in order to advance the struggle for a workers' government.

ii) The Contradictory Role of Russian Politicians in the Donbass Republics and the Interference of Imperialist Russia

It is crucial to understand the relationship of the Donbass Peoples' Republics with the Russian government. Those centrist forces who supported the Kiev regime in the civil war stress that the Peoples' Republics are simply tools of Putin and his expansionist plan (e.g., the Mandelite Fourth International, the Morenoite LIT-FI and UIT-FI, AWL in Britain). On the other hand, the centrist supporters of the Donbass separatists reduce the problem to their "backward nationalism" which often occurs in national liberation struggles (e.g., IMT, WPB/LFI, Counterfire). We think that both positions are one-sided and simplistic and fail to comprehend the extremely complex nature of the concrete relationship.

As we have already explained, the uprising in east Ukraine was a spontaneous process. Later, numerous politicians and hundreds or even thousands of volunteers arrived from Russia. Were they all under the command of Putin? No, we don't believe that this is the correct explanation, as could be seen in various incidents. For example, on 7 May President Putin called for a de-escalation of the Ukrainian crisis and announced that he will *"ask the representatives of Southeast Ukraine [who] support federalization to delay the referendum planned for May 11, to create conditions for a dialogue."* However, the leader of the People's Republics replied on the same day that they, with *"all due respect,"* rejected Putin's *"advice"* to postpone the referendum or begin any *"dialogue with Kiev."*⁴¹

Similarly, the leadership of the separatists insisted on a certain independence from the decisions of the Putin government. When Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, agreed to a deal in Geneva, Denis Pushilin declared: *"He (Lavrov) did not do it for us - he did it in the name of the Russian Federation. (...) Nobody asked us, but all the actions of the Russian Federation are for a peaceful resolution of the conflict."*⁴²

Another separatist leader, the separatist mayor of Slavyansk, Vyacheslav Ponomaryov, said, *"Whatever had been decided in Geneva has been decided without our participa-*

*tion."*⁴³

Another obvious proof of their not simply being Putin's tools is the permanent lack of unity in the policies adopted by the republics' leaderships, constituting in fact a chaotic lack of centralization. Instead of unity we repeatedly witnessed open rivalry between different leaders and militias. All this has led to repeated resignations, arrests, and new appointments. In addition, there have been numerous reports about incompetent militia leaders who caused many soldiers' death. This is clear proof that the Peoples' Republics were not being centrally managed by Moscow. An excellent, diametrically opposed example is how things were handled in March when Russia annexed the Crimea. This was clearly a highly-disciplined affair, centrally organized by the Russian state and its armed forces.

So, is what we have seen been a purely locally determined process without any serious interference by Russian imperialism? No, this would be an equally wrong assertion. First, as we have shown, the leading figures in the Peoples' Republics are close to – or, better put, agents of – figures like Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, the oligarch Konstantin Malofeev who again is close to the Kremlin, or influential ideologists like Alexander Dugin. In other words, they are agents of the Eurasian wing of Russia's ruling class.

The Russian monopoly bourgeoisie is – like all ruling classes – divided into different factions. While there are groups which have a more globalist and less-confrontational outlook concerning Russia's Western rivals, there is also the Eurasian wing which consciously pushes to rebuild and expand the Russian empire as an open rival to the US. Putin is enthroned above these factions and rules and maneuvers like a Bonaparte between them.

Given the close relationship of the Eurasian faction to Putin, and given the authoritarian character of the Russian state, it is impossible to imagine that their substantial operations in east Ukraine – including the regular material support as well as many volunteers – would have been possible without the approval of the central authorities in Moscow. Yet additional proof in this direction is the great support which the separatist leadership receives from the state and pro-Putin media.

In addition, one cannot avoid but seeing that the leadership of the separatists is openly pro-imperialist and has called from the very start for a military intervention of Russia. The meaning of the repeated calls for the intervention of *"Russian peacekeeping soldiers in eastern Ukraine"* was nothing else than a call for imperialist intervention.

To summarize, what we witnessed in the period between April and August of this year was a process of increasing interference and domination by a wing of the bourgeoisie of imperialist Russia. This influence, however, was not decisive and strong enough, seeing as it could not sufficiently strengthen the military capabilities of the Donbass republics (both in terms of manpower and of military equipment). Neither could it create a centralized and consolidated political and military leadership.



III. IMPERIALISM AND NATIONAL QUESTION: THE PECULIARITY OF THE RUSSOPHONE MINORITIES

Let us now deal with a peculiar aspect of the uprising of the Russophone minority in the east Ukraine. As we know, the history of the imperialist epoch since the beginning of the 20th century is replete with national liberation struggles. Usually these struggles, of oppressed or discriminated minorities, take place under the leadership of petty-bourgeois or bourgeois nationalist leaderships. Such national liberation struggles most often have as their goal the gaining of autonomy inside the state or the formation of an independent state. However, in some cases, the aim of the struggling national minority is to join another state.

Many times Lenin and the Bolsheviks stated that socialists must support the liberation struggles of oppressed or discriminated-against nations against their respective oppressors. Similarly, they explained, the defense of the right of national-self-determination of oppressed nations also includes the right of an oppressed nation to secede from its oppressor state and form an independent one. The Bolsheviks not only fought for such a revolutionary-democratic and internationalist program in general but did do specifically in their own country against their "own" Greater Russian ruling class. As Lenin explained many times, such struggles are linked with their perspective of the socialist revolution:

*"The Russian proletariat cannot march at the head of the people towards a victorious democratic revolution (which is its immediate task), or fight alongside its brothers, the proletarians of Europe, for a socialist revolution, without immediately demanding, fully and "rückhaltlos", for all nations oppressed by tsarism, the freedom to secede from Russia. This we demand, not independently of our revolutionary struggle for socialism, but because this struggle will remain a hollow phrase if it is not linked up with a revolutionary approach to all questions of democracy, including the national question. We demand freedom of self-determination, i.e., independence, i.e., freedom of secession for the oppressed nations, not because we have dreamt of splitting up the country economically, or of the ideal of small states, but, on the contrary, because we want large states and the closer unity and even fusion of nations, only on a truly democratic, truly internationalist basis, which is inconceivable without the freedom to secede. Just as Marx, in 1869, demanded the separation of Ireland, not for a split between Ireland and Britain, but for a subsequent free union between them, not so as to secure "justice for Ireland", but in the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the British proletariat, we in the same way consider the refusal of Russian socialists to demand freedom of self-determination for nations, in the sense we have indicated above, to be a direct betrayal of democracy, internationalism and socialism."*⁴⁴

After the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks proved in practice that they were ready to implement their program of national self-determination.⁴⁵

i) The Peculiar Aspect of the Legitimate National Struggle of the Russophone Minorities in the East Ukraine

The peculiarity of the uprising of the Russophone minority in the east Ukraine is that it is a national struggle of a national minority in a semi-colonial country which considers itself – at least a significant part of it – as part of the same nationality (the *Russkiy Mir*) as the dominant nation of the imperialist neighboring state. This peculiarity makes it much easier for the bourgeoisie of the Russian imperialist state to increasingly control the struggle so that it objectively leads to the annexation of the territories claimed by the struggling national minority to this imperialist state. Various leftists refuse to consider ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, in the Baltic states, etc., as minorities which are discriminated against. These leftists point to the dominating, privileged status which the Russians had in the Stalinist Soviet Union. This is obviously true. Trotsky pointed out repeatedly that the Stalinist bureaucracy has reestablished national oppression by Greater Russian chauvinism. For this reason he called upon Marxists to support the oppressed people's right of national self-determination which he concretized by calling for an "*independent Soviet-Ukraine*":

*"After all, even the constitution of the USSR acknowledges the right of its component federated peoples to self-determination, that is, to separation. Thus, not even the incumbent Kremlin oligarchy dares to deny this principle. To be sure it remains only on paper. The slightest attempt to raise the question of an independent Ukraine openly would mean immediate execution on the charge of treason. But it is precisely this despicable equivocation, it is precisely this ruthless hounding of all free national thought that has led the toiling masses of the Ukraine, to an even greater degree than the masses of Great Russia, to look upon the rule of the Kremlin as monstrously oppressive. (...) We reply that the weakening of the USSR is caused by those ever-growing centrifugal tendencies generated by the Bonapartist dictatorship. In the event of war the hatred of the masses for the ruling clique can lead to the collapse of all the social conquests of October. The source of defeatist moods is in the Kremlin. An independent Soviet Ukraine, on the other hand, would become, if only by virtue of its own interests, a mighty southwestern bulwark of the USSR. The sooner the present Bonapartist caste is undermined, upset, crushed and swept away, the firmer the defense of the Soviet Republic will become and the more certain its socialist future."*⁴⁶

However, the collapse and break-up of the USSR in 1991 and the creation of a number of new, independent states has changed the situation. The ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, in the Baltic States, etc., were no longer the ruling nation. In some states, today they are severely discriminated against like; for example, the Russians in Latvia and Estonia. In these latter-day republics, many ethnic Russians

do not even have citizenship, despite the fact that they constitute substantial minorities of the republics' populations – 27.6% in Latvia and 24% in Estonia, respectively. Thus, local members of the former ruling nation have been transformed into discriminated minorities in these new states. Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that the Russophone population in the eastern Ukraine rose up spontaneously when Ukrainian chauvinists and fascists took power in Kiev and threatened to abolish Russian as an official language. However, at the same time it is important to recognize that – particularly in a situation of civil war with the looming threat of open military intervention by the imperialist neighboring state – that the character of the uprising can easily be transformed due to this interference.

**ii) An Historical Analogy:
The German Minorities in Eastern Europe
in the 1920s and 1930s**

There are only a few parallels in history to such a situation. One such analogy is the struggle of German minorities for national rights in eastern and south-eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. At the time, the communists, in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, recognized the oppression of German minorities in countries like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc., and fought for their national rights. However, given the failure of the Communist parties at that time, these German minorities could not be won to a revolutionary and internationalist perspective, and their struggles were utilized by Nazi-Germany in the later 1930s. As a result, most Germans initially welcomed the Wehrmacht when it invaded their oppressor countries. In the period when it was led by Lenin and Trotsky, the Communist International considered the German minorities in Eastern Europe as oppressed national groups. "Aside from France, there exist its vassal States, all of which by the peace of Versailles and the succeeding treaties were allotted territories inhabited by alien and hostile populations. Poland has a great many Ukrainian, Little Russian, and German inhabitants, while Czechoslovakia may be likened to the former Austri-

an Empire, because, apart from Czechoslovakians, it is populated by Germans and Hungarians. A great many Hungarians and Bessarabians have been enslaved by Rumania. Large numbers of Bulgarians have been brought under Rumanian and Yugoslav rule. The status quo in central, southern, and eastern Europe rests today on bayonets." 47

Later, Stalinism denied the oppressive character of the Czechoslovakian state with regard to the latter's national minorities, because Moscow was looking for an alliance with French imperialism and its allies in Eastern Europe. 48 Trotsky resolutely opposed this strategy and the derived popular front tactic because it led to a political bloc with sectors of the bourgeoisie antagonistic to the interests of the working class. As a result, while Stalinists defended Czechoslovakia as a "democratic" and "anti-fascist" state, Trotsky denounced it as an imperialist oppressor state which subjugated and exploited its national minorities as "internal colonies":

"The Slovaks, numbering about 3.5 million, feel like oppressed people and fight for autonomy. Then the Germans, the Sudeten Germans, number 3.5 million, and the Hungarians almost a million. (...) You see that they have 6 million Czechs and 9 million of different minorities who are oppressed by the Czechs – severely oppressed. You see that if they don't have foreign colonies they have internal colonies (...). Now the Stalinists want to force these 15 million to defend democracy but they do not speak of the fact that the Czech democracy is one of the shabbiest in this epoch in which all democracies have doubtful status. These national minorities under the national oppression of Czech democracy should no more defend democracy than the Algerians or the Moroccans or the Hindus in their relation to England. (...) the German workers, who are oppressed doubly as a class and as a nationality, cannot become Czech patriots." 49

Similarly the Trotskyists recognized the national oppression of the various minorities – including the Germans – in other Eastern European countries. They did do so irrespective of the fact that Germany – the "mother country" of the local German minorities – had an imperialist character and in various cases the German minorities wanted to join Germany.

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Russia as a Great Imperialist Power

By Michael Pröbsting, March 2014

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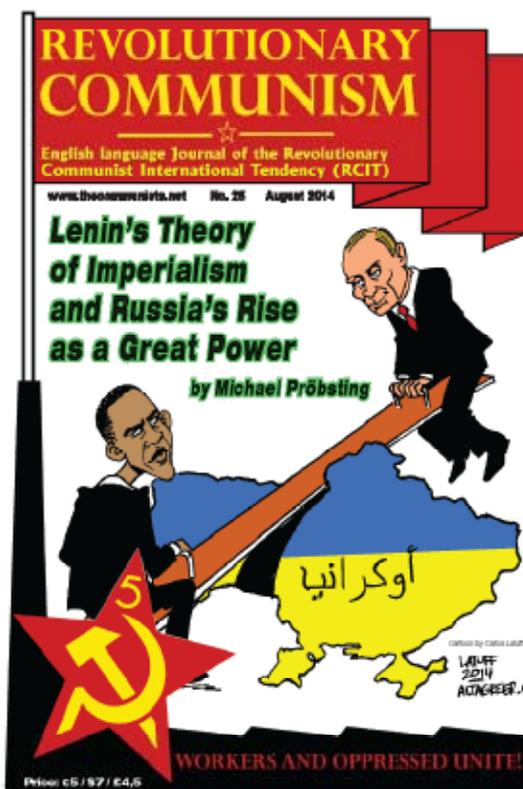
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By Michael Pröbsting, August 2014



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IV. CROSSING THE RUBICON: THE KREMLIN TAKES OVER

Let us now move on to analyze the qualitative change in the nature of the uprising which occurred in August when the Donbass leadership basically became a tool of Russian imperialism's foreign policy. Obviously, from the beginning, Russia's ruling class gave the uprising tacit support. However, Moscow did not view the uprising as an instrument by which it could annex the Donbass region (as it did with the Crimea). Rather, it saw the uprising as a means to put pressure on the new regime in Kiev and to get it to agree to compromises with Moscow (i.e., the Ukraine would not join the EU and NATO; favorable commercial conditions for Russian companies trading with Ukraine; etc.) It is for this reason, as well as because of the spontaneous origin of the uprising and its subsequently chaotic nature, that the Donbass "Peoples' Republics" retained a certain degree of independence.

However, the Donbass republics were clearly outnumbered. Together, the provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk were the home of only 6.5 million people before the start of the civil war. Ukraine as a whole (without these two provinces) has 37.5 million inhabitants. While the Ukraine's army was certainly in a relatively antiquated and poor state, the condition of the new militias in Donbass were hardly any better, given that they started out with nothing. The fact that the Donbass uprising could hold out for so long has to be explained primarily by the separatists' superiority in terms of morale: they were defending their homeland and had the support of the local population as opposed to most soldiers of the Ukrainian army who had no motivation to fight for the interests of a reactionary regime in a territory where the local population was hostile to them.

Nevertheless, in the end the separatists had to face the superiority of Kiev's army in terms of numbers. About 50,000 Ukrainian military personnel participated in the operation to conquer the Donetsk and Lugansk provinces. In addition, they have – in contrast to the separatists – an air force, helicopters, and far heavier artillery.⁵⁰ Pavel Gubaryev, one of the leaders of the Peoples' Republics, claimed in August that their militias number some 20,000 soldiers. However this number is most likely an upward exaggeration. Gubarev himself admitted that only 2,300 Donbas residents enlisted in their militias from the start of mobilization in mid-May until 1 August. Ukrainian military sources put the number of armed separatists in Donbas at 7,000. Probably the real number is somewhere in between.⁵¹

i) Summary of the Military Developments in the Summer of 2014

Therefore, it was hardly surprising that the Ukrainian army went on the offensive from late June. From this point until mid-August they conquered huge swaths of territory of the Peoples' Republics. On 5 July, they captured the rebel strongholds of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Chief

rebel commander Igor Girkin/Strelkov decided to give up the northern sector of the rebels' territory and withdrew his forces to Donetsk city.

In the following weeks, the Ukrainian army advanced further. On 18 August, Ukrainian units captured the heavily fortified crossroads town of Ilovaysk, southeast of Donetsk. De facto, they had split the rebel territories of Donetsk and Lugansk and nearly cut off access of the Donetsk People's Republic to their supply lines with Russia. Both the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk were nearly encircled by the Ukrainian army.

However, at this point, as we will detail further below, the Russian army massively intervened. Russian regular force consisting of paratroopers and mechanized units suddenly crossed the border on 24–25 August and drove back the Ukrainian army. Barrages of Russian artillery and multiple rocket launching systems (MRLS) fired from across the border also harassed the Ukrainian military. In addition, the rebels received a number of tanks and heavy artillery from the Russians. The Ukrainian joint-force operational group "South" near Ilovaysk was annihilated. In this way, the Ukrainian encirclement of the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk was broken. The land corridor between the two "Peoples' Republics" was restored. Additional territory on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian border fell to Russian and rebels control, enabling unrestricted cross-border movements of troops and supplies.

At the same time, Russian armored force, moving from Russia's Rostov oblast, crossed the border and captured the border town of Novoazovsk near the Azov Sea coastline south of Donetsk region. They advanced until they reached the vicinity of the strategically important coastal town, Mariupol. According to Ukrainian President Poroshenko, the army lost 60-65% of its total active equipment. At this point, 5 September, Putin forced the advancing rebels to accept a ceasefire. As a result, the Russian and rebel forces now hold about 40% of territory – including the more industrialized areas as well as the major cities – and one half of the population in the Donetsk and Lugansk provinces.⁵²

To summarize, Russia's massive intervention radically changed the course of war. In only twelve days the Donbass republics went from near military collapse to a full-scale offensive during which they drove back the Ukrainian army, re-conquered much territory and destroyed two thirds of their enemy's military equipment.

ii) Evidence for Russian Intervention: The Political Aspect

Various groups which correctly supported the uprising in east Ukraine – like the IMT, Counterfire, WPB/LFI, LCFI etc. – have failed to recognize the implications of the Russian intervention and, hence, the transformation of the nature of the civil war. However, it is pretty obvious that such an intervention took place. Furthermore, it was po-

litically prepared in advance.

Let us first go back to the political goals of the Putin regime. As we stated above, Moscow did not intend to annex the Donbass region but rather only wanted to utilize the uprising as a means to put pressure on the new regime in Kiev and to get an advantageous deal in their bilateral relations. At the end of August, the Russian publication *Novoye Vremya* published an enlightening interview with Vladimir Lukin. Lukin is a veteran policymaker who served as ambassador to the United States and was Putin's human rights commissioner from February 2004 to March 2014. He also represented Russia in the West's negotiations with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and the right-wing opposition on February 20. In this interview, Lukin explains that the Donbas isn't Russia's goal at all: "No one in the Kremlin needs the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic, or New Russia," he said. Indeed, "to win the Donbas and to lose Ukraine would be a defeat for the Kremlin." When pressed further about the purpose of the Kremlin's agitation in the region, Lukin responded that one should "forget the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics. The goal is to demonstrate to Poroshenko that he cannot win." Russia, he said, would "introduce as many [troops] as necessary to persuade Poroshenko that he must negotiate with whomever Putin chooses."

Moscow hopes to pressure the Poroshenko regime into federalizing the Ukraine, a situation which would give much more power to the provinces, meaning that pro-Russian regions could block any pro-Western move by Kiev. Lukin elaborated in that interview that under such circumstances "any referendum on joining any bloc would

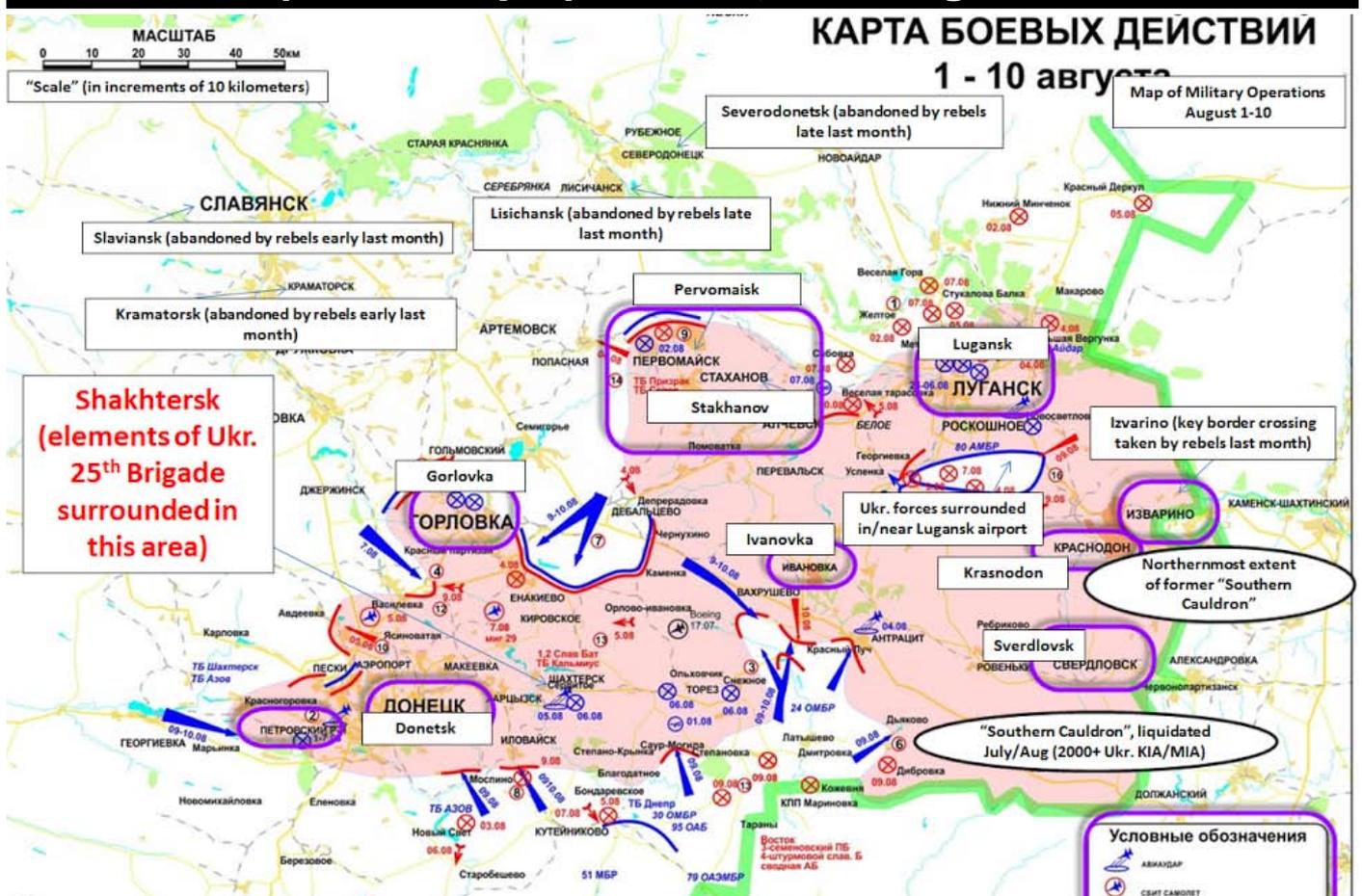
have to take place in every region, and if only one were against, then the country could not join." Therefore, the Kremlin sees its influence in Donetsk and Lugansk as a guarantee that Ukraine will not join NATO. The Kremlin's ideal outcome, according to Lukin, is that "everything should go back to as it was under Yanukovich, but without Yanukovich."

When asked how long the civil war would continue, Lukin explained: "We're in no hurry. [Poroshenko] is the one who needs to hurry. Or else the girl with the braid [former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko] will eat him up. Poroshenko's chair is on fire beneath his butt, not ours." He added: "It was because of the false certainty of the Ukrainians that they could win that they proceeded so actively with the Anti-Terrorist Operation." Now, Lukin explained, "everyone sees they cannot win" and so "the most militarily active stage has passed."

The US journal *Foreign Affairs*, commented on this interview: "Lukin's statements make some sense. First, they provide an answer to the question of why Putin didn't seize the opportunity to invade Ukraine earlier in the conflict. The Ukrainian government and army were completely disorganized after the Maidan revolution, and a quick strike could have won Putin Kiev. If Lukin is right, an invasion may never have been in the cards. Instead, Putin may have placed his hopes on the secessionist movements that formed the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as a way to get him what he wanted at lower cost. When those failed to win a decisive victory and to prevent a Ukrainian rollback, Putin intervened. In the last few days, he seems to have halted and partially reversed the Ukrainian advance."⁵³

The Russian regime's readiness to intervene militarily was also expressed by statements of Sergei Glazyev. Glazyev,

Map of Military Operations, 1.-10 August 2014



Source: <http://globaleconomicanalysis.blogspot.co.at/2014/08/rebels-claim-liberation-of-mariupol.html>

a supporter of the Eurasian faction, was appointed by Putin in July 2012 as presidential aide for the coordination of the work of federal agencies in developing the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Currently he also serves as Putin's economic advisor in charge of the Ukrainian situation. Glazyev told journalists in an interview with the Russian publication *Pravda*: "Time is on the side of the Nazis [referring to the authorities in Kiev, including Poroshenko]." The "Kiev Nazis," according to Glazyev, armed, financed and directed by Washington, are swiftly building up a formidable war machine: "In February, they had 20,000 armed men, by September they may have 200,000." Glazyev argued that armed action must be taken before the pro-Russian separatists are defeated and Moscow is facing a hostile army ready to invade and "liberate" Crimea. Glazyev advocated an imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine, while the Russian air force may knock out Ukrainian armor "like the Americans [did] in Libya".⁵⁴

When the Ukrainian army advanced in summer, it was no longer "only" the Eurasian wing of Russia's ruling class which insisted on a robust intervention in order to avoid a collapse of the Donbass republics. Putin himself understood that if he would continue to tolerate the chaos in the republics and not intervene, military defeat for them and diplomatic defeat for him were certain. Hence he had to put the leadership of the "People's Republics" under full control. To achieve this, Moscow ordered their agent Alexander Borodai, the prime minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, back to Moscow to give him new instructions. When he returned home in early August, Borodai initiated a number of changes in the leadership personal of the Donbass republics. Colonel Igor Strelkov/Girkin, who had increasingly acted independently, was stripped of his power. Borodai stated in his public declarations that he supports a "nativization" of the leadership, i.e. putting more native Donbass representatives at the top (which, by the way, is a remarkable admission of the strong foreign influence at the top of the "People's Republics). Consistent with this policy, he resigned as prime minister and appointed locally-born Vladimir Zakharchenko as his successor. In addition Borodai appointed another Donetsk native, Vadimir Kononov – a hitherto mid-ranking paramilitary fighter who uses the nickname "Tsar" – as the new DPR defense minister.

Despite such formal "nativization" of the leadership, Moscow in fact took over full control. Borodai remained "first deputy prime minister" and "senior advisor to the prime minister and government" and continues to act as the strong man in the Donbass republics. He put a whole team of *siloviki* in charge of key positions. Lieutenant-General Vladimir Antyufeyev, the long-serving state security minister in Moldova's secessionist Transdniestria, came in as DPR deputy prime minister on 10 July and became first deputy prime minister in late July, with supervisory powers over the "security sector." With his arrival in Donetsk came an entire team. He also became acting defense minister in late July, for reasons not stated, but foreshadowing Strelkov/Girkin's demotion. Antyufeyev's confidants from Transnistria, Andrei Pinchuk and Oleg Bereza, became "state security minister" and internal affairs minister, respectively, of the Donetsk Peoples Republic.

Another Russian agent, outside the security sector, is Aleksandr Karaman who became the new DPR deputy prime

minister for social issues. Karaman is the former vice president of Transnistria and, as mentioned above, a protégé of Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.⁵⁵

It is noteworthy that Borodai explained the need to place more native persons in top position with the prospects of possible negotiations to end the civil war. In that eventuality, the DPR's leadership would need to show native faces to the world. This motivation makes clear that these personal changes were part of a broader plan of the Putin government: first putting the republics leadership under full control of Moscow, then intervening militarily to create better conditions for negotiations from a position of strength and establishing a favorable political solution.

The disempowerment of the Donbass republics' leadership also became obvious during the conclusion of the ceasefire process. The Kremlin established a direct channel with the Poroshenko government and in this way negotiated the details of the ceasefire. The results were only presented to the rebel leaders as a *fait accompli*:

*"The Kremlin seeks to: 1) Entangle Poroshenko into a bilateral, non-transparent relationship with President Vladimir Putin's administration. This process is an incipient one. Putin's top advisor Vladislav Surkov has visited Kyiv repeatedly and covertly for talks on the terms of the armistice, post-armistice and post-election political developments. According to some Kiev insiders, the armistice terms were worked out in that bilateral channel between the presidential administrations, before being formalized in Minsk on September 5 and September 19–20. Ukrainian presidential administration head Borys Lozhkin maintains permanent contact by telephone with his counterpart Sergei Ivanov in the Kremlin, apparently beseeching the latter to act as a referee on ceasefire violations by Russia's proxies in Donbas."*⁵⁶

Another indication that the Kremlin is consolidating its grip over the Donbass republics has been the recent assassination attempt on the life of Pavel Gubarev, which left him in a state of coma in hospital. Gubarev's car was attacked at midnight on 12 October when he was returning from a meeting in Rostov-on-Don in Russia. This assassination attempt was most likely the work of some Kremlin agents since it took place only a few days after his party was disqualified from participating in November presidential elections by the electoral commission of the Donetsk People's Republic. Gubarev, an ally of the deposed Igor Strelkov, posted only hours before the assassination a message on his Facebook page announcing he was due to make "a very important statement". The ambush came only days before Poroshenko and Putin met in Milan to discuss the Ukraine crisis.⁵⁷

iii) Evidence for Russian Intervention: The Military Aspect

After the political preparations in the Donbass leadership were made, the Russian army intervened and dramatically changed the course of the war. As we already mentioned, the rebel forces have relatively few local fighters, Gubarev having giving the figure of only 2,300 Donbas residents enlisted in their militias.

Another separatist leader, Fyodor Berezin, complained in a mid-August interview: "To hell! Nobody wants to fight! (...) The Ukrainian army is shooting at the city, people are falling -- and only because the men of Donetsk don't want to go to the front."⁵⁸

Igor Strelkov, the defense minister at the time, frequently went on a separatist television channel to complain about the lack of volunteers for the militia saying they needed at least 10,000 more troops.⁵⁹

This proves that the Donbass republics did not themselves have sufficient manpower to radically change the course of war in twelve days as occurred in late August/early September. Recall that it was then that the Donbass republics went from near military collapse to a full-scale offensive and defeated the Ukrainian army thanks to the massive intervention of the Russian army.

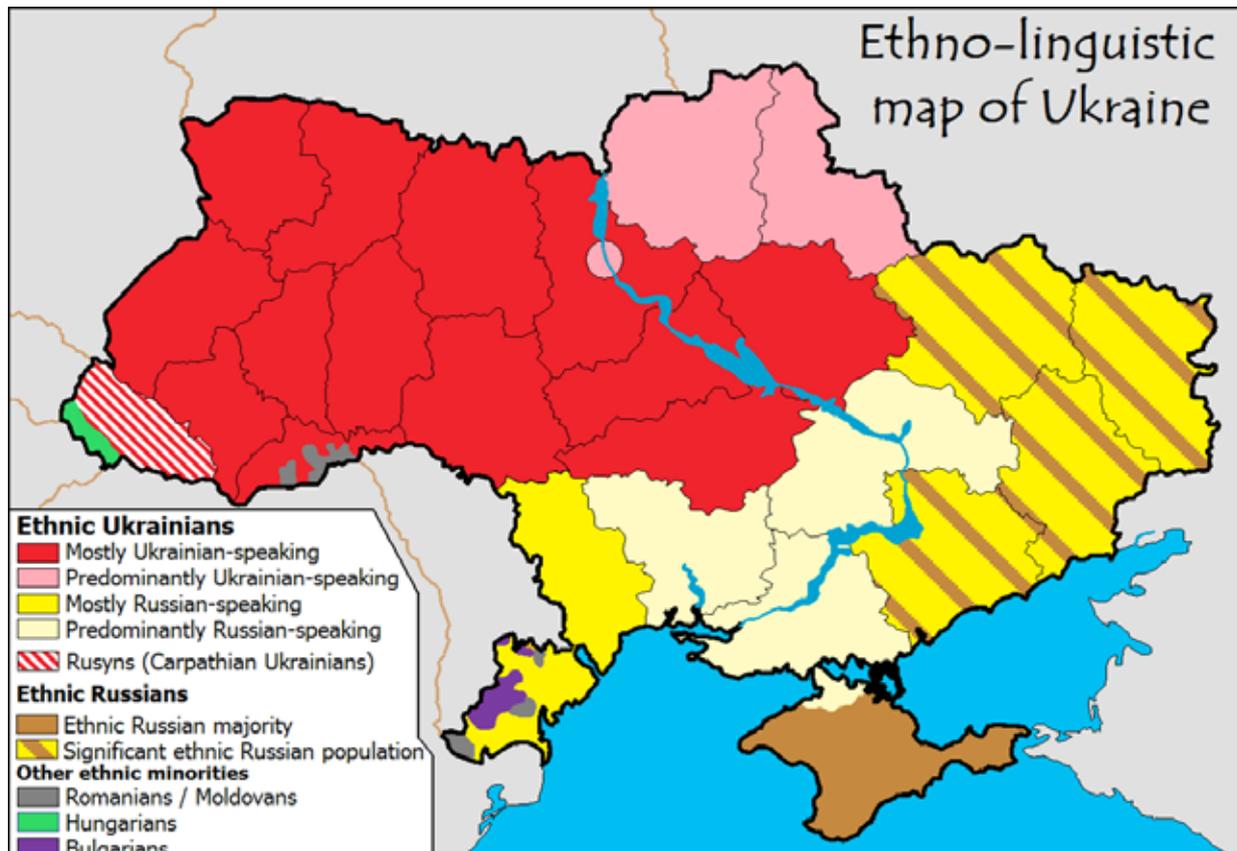
As is well-known, thousands of Russians are fighting on the side of the separatists. Of course, many of them are volunteers. However, it has been shown proven that there are also many active regular Russian soldiers amongst them, troops which could only be there by the order of the Russian military command. Prime Minister Alexander Zakharchenko indeed admitted the presence of Russian soldiers in east Ukraine, but claimed that are there on vacation: "Among us are fighting serving [Russian] soldiers, who would rather take their vacation not on a beach but with us, among brothers, who are fighting for their freedom."⁶⁰ Sergei Baryshnikov, a local ideologist of the Donbass republics, also claimed that there are "thousands" of regular Russian soldiers who had "volunteered" to come.⁶¹ It goes without saying that this can only be considered a joke.

In addition, ten Russian paratroopers were captured by the Ukrainian army. On video, the prisoners quickly admitted that a) they were Russian, and b) they had been ordered to cross the border. The Russian Defense Ministry then stated that they had accidentally wandered across the border. "The soldiers really did participate in a patrol of a section of the Russian-Ukrainian border, crossed it by accident on an unmarked section, and as far as we understand showed no

resistance to the armed forces of Ukraine when they were detained."⁶² Since the captive soldiers they were caught 20 kilometers inside Ukrainian territory, such claims are once again merely ridiculous.

Various Russian human rights organizations have also provided concrete evidence about the Russian intervention. The organization *Zabyty Polk* (Forgotten Regiment), which specializes in conducting research on lost combatants and assisting their families, published an approximate description of the Russian forces that are fighting in eastern Ukraine. According to the organization, the total number of the Russian forces fighting in Ukraine and stationed along the border is estimated at about 12–15,000. "A breakdown reveals that Russian servicemen from various military units based in Chechnya, Dagestan, Stavropol region, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Adygea, Abkhazia and Kabardino-Balkaria are participating in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Several military units based in Krasnodar and Rostov regions, which are adjacent to the North Caucasus, are also taking part in the conflict. In fact, the majority of the Russian forces fighting in Ukraine appear to have come from Russian military units based in the North Caucasus."⁶³

Another organization, the *Committee of Soldiers' Mothers* of the Stavropol region, independently compiled a list of Russian army losses in Ukraine at the end of August. It estimated that about 400 Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded. "Most of them came from three Russian motorized brigades—the 19th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, based in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia; the 17th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade, stationed in Shali, Chechnya; and the 8th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade, stationed in Shatoi, Chechnya. Chechen and Dagestani soldiers fighting in Ukraine reportedly suffered massive losses. As Russia has not officially declared war on Ukraine, the authorities have tried to cover up these stories by



Source: Wikimedia, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/Ethnolinguistic_map_of_ukraine.png

*promising to pay large amounts of money to the relatives of the slain servicemen to keep them quiet.”*⁶⁴

Additional evidence for Russia military intervention in the Ukraine is the fact that there are hundreds of Chechen and Dagestani soldiers fighting there who are under the command of Putin's Quislings in Chechnya and Dagestan, Ramzan Kadyrov and Ramazan Abdulatipov respectively. These lackeys of Moscow would never send their soldiers far away without the consent of the Kremlin. The presence of these notorious butchers, responsible for the killing, torture, and rape of thousands of Chechen resistance fighters and civilians is yet further proof of the increasingly reactionary character of the Donbass leadership.

According to Ella Polyakova and Sergei Krivenko, both members of the Russian presidential human rights council, more than 100 Russian soldiers were killed in eastern Ukraine in a single battle near the town of Snizhnye. In the same incident, 300 people were wounded. Contradicting Zakharchenko's claim that the soldiers were in the Ukraine "on vacation," Polyakova claimed that not one of the soldiers she or her colleagues had spoken to had filled out a form to go on vacation, standard procedure for contract soldiers. Krivenko added that he said that had received complaints from parents of the soldiers who were unable to contact their sons.⁶⁵

The final proof that Moscow has taken full over control over the Donbass republics is that, on 5 September, their leadership was forced to agree to the ceasefire which the Russian government had negotiated in Minsk. It is well known that, previous to signing, the Donbass leaders were unhappy with the ceasefire because the rebel forces (together with the Russian army) were advancing and could have conquered much more territory. However, for political reasons, the Kremlin imposed the ceasefire.⁶⁶

iv) Conclusions for Revolutionary Tactics

To summarize, from the beginning of the uprising in the east Ukraine, sectors of Russia's imperialist bourgeoisie supported the insurgency. They did so because US and EU imperialism is actively attempting to subjugate the Ukraine as a semi-colony of the West. In the period of capitalist decay, the rivalry between the Great Powers inevitably accelerates. Thus, Russia's monopoly capital is desperately fighting to keep its influence in the Ukraine.

However this increasing inter-imperialist rivalry and Russia's struggle to retain its influence in the country did not eliminate the progressive and legitimate character of the spontaneous rebellion which received support from the mass of Donbass' population. However, the absence of any revolutionary leadership allowed right-wing and reactionary Greater Russian forces to take over the uprising.

While the Kremlin provided some political and material support to the movement and gained considerable influence on the ground, the struggle of the Donetsk and Lugansk republics managed to retain some forms of independence. This all changed during the summer 2014 – beginning in July and culminating in late August – when Moscow replaced the local leadership, placed Russian agents into the decisive positions, and sent thousands of regular troops to successfully drive back the advancing Ukrainian army. When it fit Putin's plan, Moscow imposed a ceasefire – despite the dissatisfaction of the rebels.

Since then the leaderships of the Donbass republics have been made mere puppets of Russian imperialism. The uprising in the east Ukraine no longer has an independent dynamic.

Hence, revolutionaries today must continue the struggle for democratic rights, against the austerity attacks of the Kiev regime, and against the fascist threat; but they cannot continue participating in a military bloc with the Donbass separatists. Instead, revolutionaries, must pursue a dual defeatist position, i.e. they have to wage a struggle on two fronts: against the imperialist bourgeoisie of US and EU and their Kiev puppets, as well as against Russian imperialism and their agents at the head of the Donbass republics.

The RCIT is by no means surprised by these development, and we actually pointed out this possible turn of events several months ago. In one of our earlier statements we warned:

*"The democratic uprising in the east is another validation of RCIT's position that every democratic and national movement has to be thoroughly studied, and must not automatically be viewed simply as a proxy in the intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry. In a world dominated by imperialist monopolies and states, it is unavoidable that these great powers will try to utilize national and democratic struggles to advance their influence. However, one has to analyze concretely whether or not a given movement has become totally subordinate to and a proxy of an imperialist power. Given that the development of movements is determined by the living laws of class struggle, they can naturally also change their character. If, for example, Russian troops would invade the Eastern Ukraine, the local uprising would lose its popular character and become a proxy of Russian imperialism. In such a situation, revolutionaries could no longer support the rebellion."*⁶⁷

This is exactly what happened in August 2014 and it is for this reason that the RCIT must take into account this development when deriving its tactic. A change in the character of the civil war requires a change in the revolutionary tactic. We can no longer support the struggle of the Donbass republics against the Kiev regime. Naturally, neither can we support the Kiev regime against the pro-Russian camp, since it is a reactionary marionette of NATO and EU imperialism. The conflict in the east Ukraine has become a proxy war between two imperialist camps – NATO and Russia.

Is it conceivable that revolutionaries will have to change their position yet again? Yes, of course. This could happen if, for example, the Putin regime – out of a position of weakness – would change its mind and drop any support for the separatists in order to close a deal with the Poroshenko regime and the Western imperialists. In such a situation, the Kiev regime will certainly try to crush the rebels with full military force. Under such conditions, the Donbass republics would be fighting for survival against annihilation by the reactionary Kiev regime, and would hence be defending the national and democratic rights of the local population. At the same time they would have regained a certain independence – not because of their political will but because Putin abandoned them. In such a situation, Bolshevik-Communists might be forced to resume their revolutionary defensist tactic and support the military struggle of the Donbass republics.

V. EXCURSE: LIBERATION STRUGGLES AND IMPERIALIST INTERFERENCE

Many times in the past we have pointed out that it is crucial for Marxists to understand that liberation struggles often take place in the shadow of attempts by imperialist powers to interfere and utilize the struggles for their own power interests. While revolutionaries have to fight against such imperialist interference, they should not automatically refuse to support and participate in such liberation movements. Quite the opposite, Bolshevik-Communists should fight inside the liberation movement, advance the struggle, and work for its independence of any bourgeois faction or imperialist power. At the same time it is necessary that Marxists continue to analyze the relationship between a given liberation movement and those imperialist powers which are trying to bring it under their control. They have to assess at what point the imperialist interference becomes sufficiently large that its quantitative measure becomes qualitative in significance, and the liberation movement basically becomes a tool of the imperialist power's foreign policy interests. This method of ours was elaborated by Lenin and Trotsky, and we have applied it to various liberation struggles in the past. The RCIT summarized the Marxist method in its program:

*“Particularly, where authoritarian regimes or the military openly trample on democratic rights, mass movements rise and fight with determination for their rights. Other states and even great imperialist powers try to exploit such domestic crises and are only too happy to expand their influence. The Bolsheviks-Communists support any real movement of the popular masses against the suppression of democratic rights. We reject any influence of reactionary forces and defend the national sovereignty of semi-colonial countries against imperialism. This can not mean that revolutionaries renounce the support of revolutionary-democratic movement. In reality, the imperialist meddling is no help for the revolutionary-democratic struggle, but threatens to undermine it. That is why we have supported progressive liberation struggles of the masses against dictatorships, but at the same time rejected sharply imperialist interventions. (E.g. the struggle of the Bosnians 1992-95, the Kosovo Albanians in 1999, the uprising against the Gaddafi dictatorship in Libya in 2011). Only when the imperialist intervention is becoming the dominant feature of the political situation, revolutionaries must subordinate the democratic struggle to the fight against such an intervention.”*⁶⁸

While this approach was both correct and important in the past, it is even more so now, during the new historic period of capitalist decay which began in 2008, when political and economic contradictions are intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries at an accelerated pace. On the backdrop of this rivalry between the great powers, it is more and more likely that this or that imperialist power will try to use local conflicts and wars to advance its own interests.

In a longer essay – *Liberation Struggles and Imperialist Inter-*

ference – we have explained the approach of the Bolshevik-Communists to the contradictory relationship of liberation struggles and imperialist interference. We explained that many centrist pseudo-revolutionaries fail to grasp this problem and therefore tend to commit the following mistakes:

a) They negate the existence of any imperialist interference in a given liberation movement. Consequently, they opportunistically adapt to the pro-imperialist leadership of this movement and hence fail to fight against this reactionary interference.

b) Or, conversely, they recognize the imperialist interference but, as a result, they refuse to take into account the progressive character of the liberation struggle. Hence, in a sectarian fashion, they denounce the liberation struggle as a tool of a given imperialist powers interest and refuse to support it. (Usually such sectarianism is just a hidden form of opportunism to this or that faction of the ruling class or an imperialist power.)

The Bolshevik-Communists' understanding of the contradictory relationship of liberation struggles and imperialist interference has aided us in the past to correctly judge the development of many national and democratic struggles and wars. Understanding this method is crucial in reaching the correct conclusions in the civil war in east Ukraine as well as – as we can expect – in the many other similar conflicts and wars in the future.

Let us now elaborate the Marxist method on this issue as we outlined it in our essay *Liberation Struggles and Imperialist Interference*.⁶⁹

i) The Marxist Classics on Progressive Struggles, Wars, and Imperialist powers

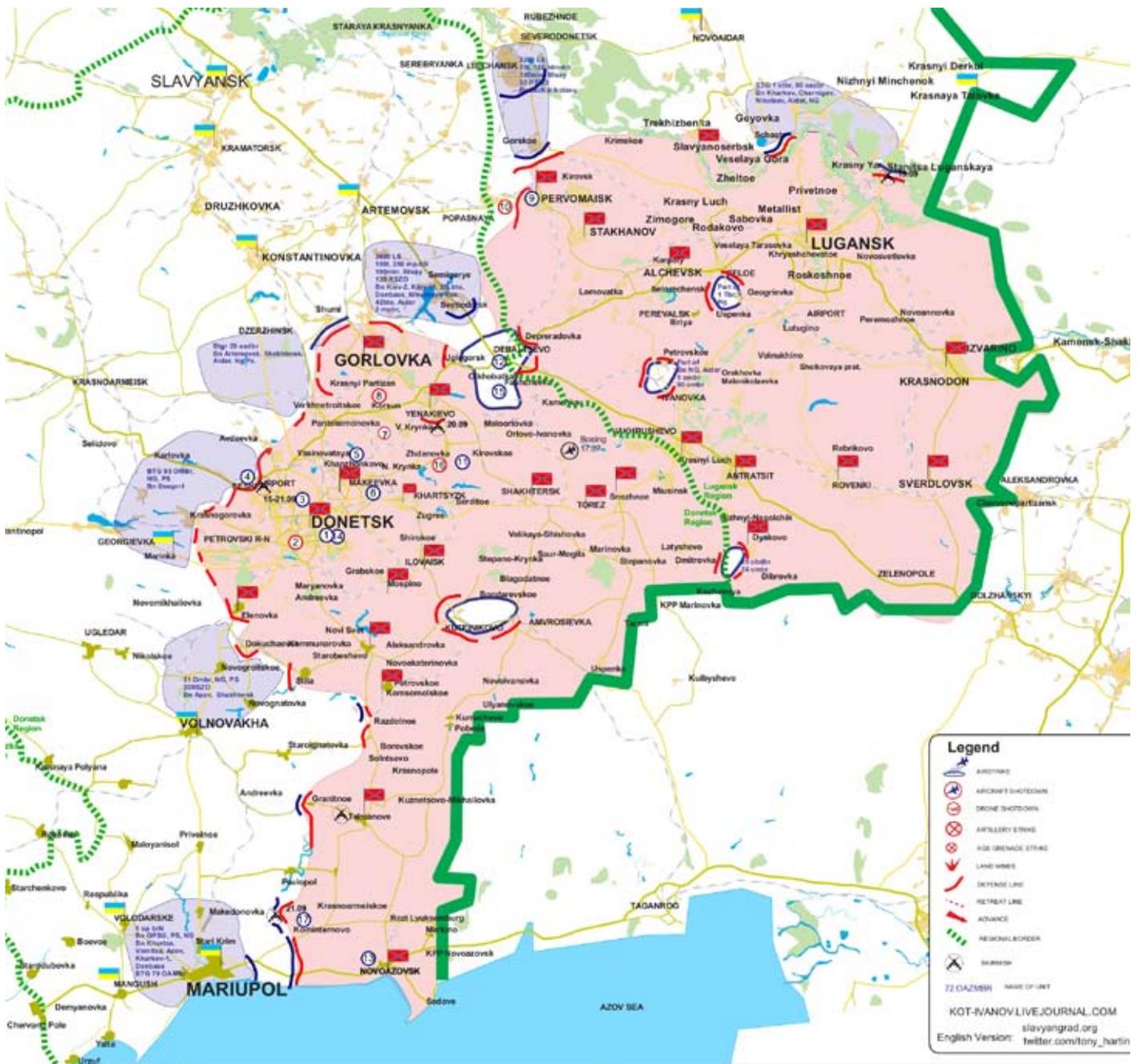
Lenin repeatedly explained that in the epoch of imperialism the great powers will always try to interfere and utilize national and democratic conflicts. However, he added, this must not lead Marxists to automatically take a defeatist position in such conflicts. Rather, what is decisive is which factor becomes the dominant aspect – the national, democratic liberation struggle or the imperialist war of conquest.

„Britain and France fought the Seven Years' War for the possession of colonies. In other words, they waged an imperialist war (which is possible on the basis of slavery and primitive capitalism as well as on the basis of modern highly developed capitalism). France suffered defeat and lost some of her colonies. Several years later there began the national liberation war of the North American States against Britain alone. France and Spain, then in possession of some parts of the present United States, concluded a friendship treaty with the States in rebellion against Britain. This they did out of hostility to Britain, i.e., in their own imperialist interests. French troops fought the British on the side

of the American forces. What we have here is a national liberation war in which imperialist rivalry is an auxiliary element, one that has no serious importance. This is the very opposite to what we see in the war of 1914-16 (the national element in the Austro-Serbian War is of no serious importance compared with the all-determining element of imperialist rivalry). It would be absurd, therefore, to apply the concept imperialism indiscriminately and conclude that national wars are "impossible". A national liberation war, waged, for example, by an alliance of Persia, India and

China against one or more of the imperialist powers, is both possible and probable, for it would follow from the national liberation movements in these countries. The transformation of such a war into an imperialist war between the present-day imperialist powers would depend upon very many concrete factors, the emergence of which it would be ridiculous to guarantee." ⁷⁰
 In another article, Lenin compared the possibility of imperialists' interference in national liberation struggles for their own aims with the possible interference of sections

Map of Military Operations, 20.-21. September 2014



20 September, 2014

- 1 Shelling of Donetsk residential areas (Kiev, Kiev, Kulyshchevsky districts)
- 2 Humanitarian Russian convoy (2 thousand tons cargo, 175 vehicles) arrived in Donetsk and began unloading
- 3 13:10 Ukranian shot OTR 'Tachka-47' at factory M. 107 (formerly ZOH) in DONETSK
- 4 The resumption of the battle in the district of Donetsk Airport
- 5 14:10 artillery bombardment of the settlement Kharpenkova
- 6 Ukre Shelling of MAKEEVKA
- 7 NAF freed the settlement Monakhova (4 km northwest, MAKEEVKA)
- 8 NAF freed the settlement KODRISUN (5 km SOUTH, GORLOVKA)
- 9 Shelling of residential Kustov NP PERIVOMAYSKY (3 civilians killed)
- 10 Shelling of the Ukre checkpoints in the district of Stakhanovsk (op Popovnyy)

- 11 22:40 Ukre units left NIZHNE KRINKA, ZHDANOVKA, MALGORLOVKA, NOVOCROVKA
- 12 Ukre units change position in the district of Debal'tsevo, moving to Osk, Obovitsa
- 13 Ukre MLRS attack on NAF positions near NP Novozovsk

21 September, 2014

- 14 Night shelling of residential areas of Donetsk (Kalinin and Budennyvsky districts)
- 15 Manoeuvring of Ukre units in the district of the locality Detalovsk
- 16 20:09 Ukre units left UGLEGORSK, YUDYNO-KOMMUNARSK, VERKHNA and NIZHNY KRINKA and ROZOVKA
- 17 Continued clashes with artillery and MLRS in the north-eastern suburbs of Mariupol

Legend

- AIRCRAFT
- AIRCRAFT SHOTDOWN
- DRONE SHOTDOWN
- ARTILLERY STRIKE
- IED/GRENADE STRIKE
- LAND MINES
- DEFENCE LINE
- RETREAT LINE
- ADVANCE
- PERSONNEL CARRIER
- SCORCHER
- 72 OZAMB
- NAME OF UNIT

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of monopoly capital in democratic struggles in imperialist countries. In both cases, Lenin argued, it would be wrong to refuse support for these struggles because such interference:

„On the other hand, the socialists of the oppressed nations must, in particular, defend and implement the full and unconditional unity, including organisational unity, of the workers of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressor nation. Without this it is impossible to defend the independent policy of the proletariat and their class solidarity with the proletariat of other countries in face of all manner of intrigues, treachery and trickery on the part of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations persistently utilise the slogans of national liberation to deceive the workers; in their internal policy they use these slogans for reactionary agreements with the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation (for example, the Poles in Austria and Russia who come to terms with reactionaries for the oppression of the Jews and Ukrainians); in their foreign policy they strive to come to terms with one of the rival imperialist powers for the sake of implementing their predatory plans (the policy of the small Balkan states, etc.). The fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain conditions, be utilised by another “great” power for its own, equally imperialist, aims, is just as unlikely to make the Social-Democrats refuse to recognise the right of nations to self-determination as the numerous cases of bourgeois utilisation of republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial plunder (as in the Romance countries, for example) are unlikely to make the Social-Democrats reject their republicanism.”⁷¹

The Trotskyists have continued to apply this approach and developed it further. Rudolf Klement, a secretary of Trotsky and a leading member of the Fourth International, elaborated the position of the Fourth International in an article called *Principles and Tactics in War*. In this article Klement wrote:

“Class struggle and war are international phenomena, which are decided internationally. But since every struggle permits of but two camps (bloc against bloc) and since imperialistic fights intertwine with the class war (world imperialism—world proletariat), there arise manifold and complex cases. The bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial countries or the liberal bourgeoisie menaced by its “own” fascism, appeal for aid to the “friendly” imperialisms; the Soviet Union attempts, for example, to utilise the antagonisms between the imperialisms by concluding alliances with one group against another, etc. The proletariat of all countries, the only international solidarity—and not least of all because of that, the only progressive—class, thereby finds itself in the complicated situation in wartime, especially in the new world war, of combining revolutionary defeatism towards his own bourgeoisie with support of progressive wars.”⁷²

Klement defends a dialectical approach, arguing that *“the proletariat, especially in the imperialist countries, requires, in this seemingly contradictory situation, a particularly clear understanding of these combined tasks and of the methods for fulfilling them.”* Later, at the end of his article, he goes on to emphasize: *“Thus we see how different war situations require from the revolutionary proletariat of the various imperialist countries, if it wishes to remain true to itself and to its goal, different fighting forms, which may appear to schematic spirits to be “deviations” from the basic principle of revolutionary defeatism, but which result in reality only from the combination of revolutionary defeatism with the defence of certain progressive camps.”*

ii) Imperialist Interventions and Military Tactics

It is such a concrete, dialectical method which the Marxists classics developed and which we apply today to the different types of wars which take place in a world situation characterized by increasing contradictions and rivalry.

Let us now elaborate our approach. We are anti-imperialist because we consistently support the liberation struggles of the working class and oppressed peoples for which imperialism is the biggest enemy. *Our anti-imperialism is a consequence of our fundamental position on the class struggle and not an overriding principle, which resides above the class struggle.*

Our method is that during such just democratic or national liberation struggles we are on the side of the liberation fighters (who, given the absence, of revolutionary leadership are mostly under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaderships) and support their military victory. We sharply differentiate between these progressive liberation struggles and the interests of the imperialist powers. While we support the first, we totally oppose the later. Hence we Bolshevik-Communists reject any imperialist interference and call for the defeat of the imperialist forces.

If we take the examples of the liberation wars in Bosnia 1992-95, Kosova 1999, Libya 2011, and Syria since 2011, we see that these struggles – while the Western imperialist powers obviously interfered – retained their character of primarily authentic democratic and national liberation struggles.⁷³

We explained in our essay: *“Of course imperialist interference can change the character of a national liberation struggle. But this is not necessarily and always the case. In our book on the Arab Revolution we already referred to the examples that the imperialists also interfered in the Chinese national liberation struggle in the 1930s and 1940s or in the guerilla mass movements in Eastern Europe against the Nazis during World War II. For example the British sent arms and officer to the Stalinist partisans of Tito and the USA sent even military aircrafts with US pilots to support the bourgeois Chiang Kai-chek forces. Did these lead the revolutionaries of the Fourth International to stop supporting these struggles?! No, and they would have been very wrong to do so. One has to concretely analyze if a given democratic or national liberation struggle becomes fully subordinated to the imperialist maneuvers and doesn’t possess any significant internal dynamic of a workers and peasant liberation struggle. If this is the case, Marxists must change their position and give up critical support for the national liberation struggle.”⁷⁴*

As we elaborated above, these conditions apply to the civil war in the Ukraine. The legitimate national and democratic character of the uprising in the east Ukraine remained the dominant aspect – despite the Russian imperialist interference from early on – from its beginning in March until August. With the taking over of the direct control of the leadership of the Donbass republics, by putting Russian agents (in the literal sense of the word) in the crucial positions and by deploying thousands of soldiers and tanks, heavy artillery, etc., the character of the uprising changed. The national liberation struggle in the east Ukraine became fully subordinated to Russian imperialist foreign policy and doesn’t possess any significant internal dynamic of a workers’ and popular liberation struggle.

VI. PROGRAMMATIC CONCLUSIONS

The RCIT took a clear and unequivocal position in the Ukraine crisis. In the first period we refused to support either the pro-Western, reactionary Euromaidan movement nor the reactionary Yanukovich government. We said in our first statement in December 2013: *“Neither Brussels nor Moscow! For an independent Workers’ Republic! A reactionary opposition mobilizes against a reactionary government. For independent working class mobilizations against both factions of Ukraine’s ruling class!”*⁷⁵ When a right-wing regime with fascists elements in its ranks took power in later February and threatened the working class in general and the Russophone population in the Donbass region in particular, the RCIT immediately supported the popular rebellion in the east and called for its victory against the Kiev-loyalist military forces. We argued that the central task was to build action councils based on regular mass assemblies in places of work and neighborhoods. On such a basis, the movement should call a democratic congress to coordinate the resistance and to form the basis for a workers’ government. Equally, such democratic mass organs should control the workers’ and popular militias. We recognized the Ukraine conflict was impossible to understand without recognizing the context of the increasing rivalry between the imperialist powers. In the RCIT’s document *Thesis on the World Situation* from April 2014 we stated:

*“The heightening of inter-imperialist rivalry will inevitably lead to destabilization of international relations between the Great Powers. It will multiply the political, diplomatic, and economic conflicts between the imperialist states and will provoke an accelerated armaments race, militarism, and chauvinism on all sides. While, in the short term, the Cold War may not turn into a shooting war in Europe, open clashes between Japan and China are quite possible in the next few years. If the international working class does not succeed in overthrowing the ruling class in time, a Third World War is the most likely outcome of the escalating inter-imperialist rivalry on the backdrop of capitalism’s decline. This rivalry and militarism will most likely increase qualitatively with outbreak of the next, and probably even deeper, Great Recession some time in the next few years. This further deepening of capitalism’s crisis will also increase the desire of the desperate ruling classes to look for a military solution to their problems, i.e., by launching a new war.”*⁷⁶

We emphasized that socialists must oppose the great power’s imperialist militarism and all kind of their sanctions against one another.

*“The RCIT restates its Leninist position on conflicts between imperialist states: We defend the program which is associated with the term revolutionary defeatism. In both camps, revolutionaries must develop propaganda along the lines “The main enemy is at home!” and “Turn the imperialist into a civil war!” The international workers’ movement must oppose all forms of sanctions issued by the imperialist states against their rivals. They must also resolutely oppose NATO’s expansion towards the East as well as Russia’s threats of invasion and its economic pressure against the Ukraine, which takes the form of raising gas prices and aggressively calling in debts.”*⁷⁷

Out of this Leninist position of revolutionary defeatism against all imperialist powers, we always made it absolutely clear that the workers’ movement in the Ukraine must neither support the imperialist NATO camp nor the imperialist Russian camp. In our joint declaration with the Russian comrades from MAS, we stated:

“On the background of the February 22 right-wing coup in the Ukraine, the rivalry between the imperialist powers has dangerously escalated. Now in power is a right-wing coalition – the so-called “Euro-Maidan” movement – composed of pro-Western conservative parties and fascist forces. This coalition overthrew the former government of Viktor Yanukovich who acted as a lackey of most Ukraine oligarchs as well as of Russian imperialism, and who ruled with increasingly authoritarian methods. (...)

At the same time, the RCIT and the MAS denounce the saber-rattling by the Putin regime. The Russian president has been granted the authority to use the country’s armed forces in the Ukraine as pro-Russian militias continue their seizure of state buildings in the country’s southeastern region of Crimea. The Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, voted overwhelmingly to back a proposal to use “the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine until the normalization of the socio-political situation in that country.” According to Ukrainian sources, Russia has already deployed 6,000 troops in the Crimea. These latest developments are nothing but the implementation of an aggressive, imperialist policy by Russia under the pretext of defending the Russian-speaking majority in Crimea. The present military maneuvers and the deployment of Russian forces in Crimea is the continuation of the Russia’s imperialist policies of the past by other means. They by no means constitute “fraternal aid for their Russian brother and sisters.”

*Equally, we denounce the reactionary saber-rattling by the Western imperialist powers. Under present conditions, the new Ukrainian regime is not an independent actor, but only the marionette of Obama, Merkel, and Hollande. In any military conflict between the Ukraine and Russia, the Ukrainian state would represent the Western imperialist powers. Hence, socialists in the Ukraine, Russia, and internationally should not support either of these two imperialist camps.”*⁷⁸

Out of our awareness about such dangers we warned against the reactionary influence of the pro-Russian chauvinist forces inside the uprising. We wrote: *“It is equally central that revolutionaries fight inside this movement against reactionary, pro-Russian imperialist and chauvinist forces. These forces are reactionary henchmen of Russian imperialism. While the Maidan slogan “Glory to the Ukraine” is reactionary, hailing Russian imperialism and its President Putin is no more progressive. This is particularly true given the history of the Ukrainian nation which for centuries has been characterized by systematic oppression by Greater Russian chauvinism – first under Tsarism until 1917 and subsequently, from the early 1930s onwards, by Stalinism. The popular uprising in the east must be transformed into an independent working class movement which expels all chauvinist and semi-fascist elements.”*⁷⁹ Subsequent events have confirmed that the RCIT was

rights to warn against the reactionary influence of the Greater Russian chauvinist forces. The degeneration of the uprising in the east Ukraine has dramatically shown the devastating consequences of the lack of a revolutionary leadership. If a sizeable revolutionary party would have existed in the Ukraine, it could have given the masses a perspective to take power in their own hands. It could have shown a perspective without Greater Russian chauvinism but with an outlook for a country-wide struggle against the reactionary Kiev regime, against the interference of all imperialist powers, for the equality of all national groups and for a socialist perspective which strives towards the expropriation of all oligarchs, the nationalization of the industry and banks and a workers' government. Unfortunately, the socialist forces proved too weak to resist the hijacking of the uprising the Russian imperialism.

We argued against the breaking-up of the Ukraine and for full autonomy of the Russophone region in the East. We wrote: "*Socialists should advocate complete equality for the Russian-language in the Ukraine and full autonomy and the right of self-government for the Russian-speaking provinces. While we defend the right of self-determination, including the right of secession, all indicators show that the huge majority of the population in the eastern part of the country does not desire such separation but rather more autonomous rights. Hence, revolutionaries should oppose the breaking up of the Ukraine and the annexation of its eastern provinces to Russia. Under current conditions, calling for the annexation of the east to Russia is simply propaganda for Russian imperialism. It is equally important that socialists struggle against Greater Russian animosity against the population of western Ukraine – even when such animosity disguises itself as 'anti-fascism.'*"⁸⁰

It is possible that this element of the RCIT program for the Ukraine has become obsolete. After the fascist massacres and the brutal war of the Kiev regime, it is unlikely that the Donbass population wants to remain part of the same

state. Under such conditions, it might be necessary to combine the struggle for working class power in the Ukraine, Donbass and Russia with the call for a *voluntary socialist federation of workers republics*.

Whatever will be the form of the future Ukraine or a possible Donbass republic, the anti-capitalist program of the RCIT remains fully valid. It is vital that the struggle *against* the looming fascist threat and *for* the defense of the rights of the Russian-speaking population of the Ukraine be combined with mobilizations against these social attacks. Ukrainian socialists must link this struggle with a call for an immediate break with the IMF, NATO, and the EU as well as the nationalization of the country's industries and financial sector under workers' control. Equally, they must fight against any subjugation to Russian imperialism like the Eurasian Union. The goal has to be the overthrow of the present government and the formation of a workers' government. To fight for the implementation of such a program, it is absolutely incumbent upon Ukrainian workers to establish an independent, revolutionary workers' party.

We can summarize the RCIT program in the present situation in the following main slogans:

- * *Down with the reactionary, pro-Western imperialist regime in Kiev! Down with the Putin regime and its puppets in the Donbass republics!*
- * *For the right of national self-determination for the Russian-speaking regions including the right to form their own state!*
- * *Build workers' and popular councils and militias to defeat the reactionary regime in Kiev and Donetsk!*
- * *Down with US/EU imperialistic expansion towards the East! No to Russian imperialism!*
- * *Expropriate all oligarchs! For the nationalization of industries and the banks under workers' control!*
- * *Neither Brussels nor Moscow! For an independent workers' republic!*



Cartoon by Carlos Latuff

APPENDIX

We refer readers also to the RCIT's past statements on the Ukraine crisis:

RCIT: After the Fascist Pogrom in Odessa: Advance the Struggle against the Counterrevolution in the Ukraine! Commemoration for the Fallen Fighters in the Struggle against the Counterrevolution! All Out for the International Day of Antifascist Solidarity on 8 May! 6.5.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 23, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/after-odessa-pogrom/>

RCIT: Counterrevolution and Mass Resistance in the Ukraine, 17.4.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mass-resistance-in-ukraine/>

Joint Statement of the RCIT and the Movement to Socialism (MAS, Russia): Ukraine: Rivalry between Imperialist Powers escalates after Right-Wing Coup: Stop the Imperialist Saber-Rattling! 2.3.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/ukraine-war-threats/>

MAS: Ukraine/Russia: The victory over the imperialist colonialism is impossible without the proletarian revolution! in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mas-declaration-5-3-2014/>

RCIT and MAS: Right-Wing Forces Take Power in the Ukraine: Mobilize the Working Class against the New Government! 25.2.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 19, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/right-wing-coup-in-ukraine/>

MAS: No to the Terror of the Bandera-Fascists! Stop the Repression against the Communists of Ukraine! 22.2.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 19, <http://www.nuevomas.blogspot.co.at/2014/02/no-to-terror-of-bandera-fascists-stop.html>

RCIT: "Ukraine: Neither Brussels nor Moscow! For an independent Workers' Republic!" 18.12.2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 18, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/ukraine-neither-brussels-nor-moscow/>

For an outline of our approach to the complex issues of progressive struggles and imperialist interference see:

Michael Pröbsting: Liberation struggles and imperialist interference. The failure of sectarian "anti-imperialism" in the West: Some general considerations from the Marxist point of view and the example of the democratic revolution in Libya in 2011, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 5, September 2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/liberation-struggle-and-imperialism/>

On imperialism in general and Western imperialism in particular we refer readers to:

Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, 2013, 448 pages, (The book has 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures), <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/>; in March 2014 the publishing house PROMEDIA published a shortened German-language translation of this book (see: <http://www.mediashop.at/typolight/index.php/buecher/items/michael-proebsting---der-grosse-raub-im-sueden>; The title is: *Der Grosse Raub im Süden. Ausbeutung im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*). A summary of the book can be read here: <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-summary/>

Michael Pröbsting: Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism, Originally published in the Book Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: *The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis* (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/impe->

[rialism-and-globalization/](http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/)

On Russian imperialism:

Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Summary of the RCIT's Analysis, 28 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-china-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: More on Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Reply to Chris Slee (Socialist Alliance, Australia) and Walter Daum (LRP, USA), 11 April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-slee-on-russia-china/>

On inter-imperialist rivalry:

In addition to the publications on imperialism listed above, we refer readers to:

RCIT: On the 100th Anniversary of the Outbreak of World War I: The Struggle against Imperialism and War. The Marxist Understanding of Modern Imperialism and the Revolutionary Program in Light of the Increasing Rivalry between the Great Powers, Revolutionary Uprisings, and Counterrevolutionary Setbacks, 25.6.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/struggle-vs-imperialism-war/>

RCIT: Escalation of Inner-Imperialist Rivalry Marks the Opening of a New Phase of World Politics. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation Adopted by the RCIT's International Executive Committee, April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* (English-language Journal of the RCIT) No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-april-2014/>

RCIT: Aggravation of Contradictions, Deepening of Crisis of Leadership. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation Adopted by the RCIT's International Executive Committee, 9.9.2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 15, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-september2013/>

RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists. Theses of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, March 2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 8, www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013

Michael Pröbsting: China's transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>

Michael Pröbsting: No to chauvinist war-mongering by Japanese and Chinese imperialism! Chinese and Japanese workers: Your main enemy is at home! Stop the conflict on the Senkaku/Diaoyu-islands in the East China Sea! 23.9.2012, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 6, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/no-war-between-china-and-japan/>

FOOTNOTES

1 See the list of RCIT documents on the Ukraine, Russia, and the inter-imperialist rivalry in the appendix of this essay.

2 For an detailed analysis of Russia as a great imperialist power see:

Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Summary of the RCIT's Analysis, 28 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-china-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: More on Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Reply to Chris Slee (Socialist Alliance, Australia) and Walter Daum (LRP, USA), 11 April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-slee-on-russia-china/>

3 RCIT: Counterrevolution and Mass Resistance in the Ukraine, 17.4.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, p.40, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mass-resistance-in-ukraine/> (Emphasis in the original)

4 John J. Mearsheimer: Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault. The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-west-s-fault>. *Foreign Affairs*, which as we said above, is highly influential and reflects the opinions of important sectors of the bourgeoisie, elaborated its criticism of the Western leaders aggressive tactics against Russia in the following way:

“According to the prevailing wisdom in the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression. (...) But this account is wrong: the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrate it into the West. At the same time, the EU's expansion eastward and the West's backing of the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine -- beginning with the Orange Revolution in 2004 -- were critical elements, too. Since the mid-1990s, Russian leaders have adamantly opposed NATO enlargement, and in recent years, they have made it clear that they would not stand by while their strategically important neighbor turned into a Western bastion. For Putin, the illegal overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected and pro-Russian president -- which he rightly labeled a “coup” -- was the final straw. He responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula he feared would host a NATO naval base, and working to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West.

Putin's pushback should have come as no surprise. After all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribe to a flawed view of international politics.

They tend to believe that the logic of realism holds little relevance in the twenty-first century and that Europe can be kept whole and free on the basis of such liberal principles as the rule of law, economic interdependence, and democracy.

But this grand scheme went awry in Ukraine. The crisis there shows that realpolitik remains relevant -- and states that ignore it do so at their own peril. U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border. Now that the consequences have been laid bare, it would be an even greater mistake to continue this misbegotten policy. U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border.”

5 See Borotba: The new neoliberal fascist Government in the Ukraine, http://borotba.org/the_new_neoliberal_fascist_government_in_ukraine.html

6 See GERMAN-FOREIGN-POLICY.COM: Ukrainian Patriots, 30.7.2014, <http://www.german-foreign-policy.com/en/fulltext/58773/print>

7 See GERMAN-FOREIGN-POLICY.COM: Radikalisierung im Parlament, 10.10.2014, <http://www.german-foreign-policy.com/de/fulltext/58969>

8 BBC Interview with Sergei Glazyev, Ukraine: Putin aide brands Poroshenko 'Nazi' ahead of EU deal, 27 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28049565>

9 RCIT: Counterrevolution and Mass Resistance in the Ukraine

10 Andrew Higgins: In Eastern Ukraine, a One-Building, Pro-Russia Realm Persists Despite Criticism, *New York Times*, April 9, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/10/world/europe/ukraine-russia.html?_r=0

11 Quoted in Roger Annis: NATO and Ukraine Government Escalate Threats Against Russian and Ukrainian People, 29 April 2014, <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/23394-nato-and-ukraine-government-escalate-threats-against-russian-and-ukrainian-people>

12 International Republican Institute: Public Opinion Survey - Residents of Ukraine, March 14 -26, 2014, <http://iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20April%205%20IRI%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20of%20Ukraine%2C%20March%2014-26%2C%202014.pdf>. We want to stress that these are all polls and surveys from pro-Western institutes. Pro-Russian sources give higher figures for the pro-Russian orientation of the Ukrainian people respectively the Donbass.

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Abspaltung , 11.05.2014, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/separatisten-verkuenden-grosse-mehrheit-fuer-abspaltung-von-ukraine-12934681.html>

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19 Rabkor: Ukraine: Donetsk miners march to stop military operations, May 28, 2014, translated by Renfrey Clarke,, published at <http://www.rogerannis.com/donbass-miners-strike-demand-withdrawal-of-kyiv-regime-military-forces/>

20 Courtney Weaver: Donetsk workers fail to answer call to rally against separatists, Financial Times, May 20, 2014 <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/73cdf238-dfec-11e3-9534-00144feabdc0.html#axzz32Tqm3Mds>

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22 Mikhail Alexeevich Krylov: Statement from Independent Donetsk Miners’ Trade Union, in: Donetsk miners to the workers of Europe: “help us break the stronghold of fascism in Ukraine”, July 14, 2014, <https://ukraineantifascistsolidarity.wordpress.com/2014/07/14/donetsk-miners-to-the-workers-of-europe-help-us-break-the-stronghold-of-fascism-in-ukraine/>

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28 Andrew E. Kramer: Rebels in Eastern Ukraine Dream of Reviving Soviet Heyday

29 RCIT: Counterrevolution and Mass Resistance in the Ukraine

30 The Lugansk People’s Republic is the smaller of the two (2.2 million versus 4.4 million population), poorer and relatively less heavily industrialized, with a less influential elite than that of Donetsk, and has always been in Donetsk’s shadow during the two decades of Ukraine’s independence. (See Vladimir Socor: Luhansk: The Other ‘People’s Republic’ in Eastern Ukraine, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 151, August 15, 2014, [http://www.jamestown.org/regions/europe/single/?tx_ttnews\[pointer\]=3&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=42757&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=51&cHash=166802d9783eb3bb02645ae60063948e#.VCIBRBZPwOs](http://www.jamestown.org/regions/europe/single/?tx_ttnews[pointer]=3&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=42757&tx_ttnews[backPid]=51&cHash=166802d9783eb3bb02645ae60063948e#.VCIBRBZPwOs))

31 We refer readers to our latest publication on Russian imperialism in which we elaborated a bit on the Eurasian movement. (See Michael Pröbsting: Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 25, August 2014, pp. 38-42, <http://www.thecomunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>)

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34 Quoted in Mat Babiak: Welcome to New Russia, <http://ukrainianpolicy.com/welcome-to-new-russia/>

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Revolutionary Communist International Tendency:

What does the RCIT stand for?

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a fighting organisation for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in various countries. The working class is the class of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labour power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, exploitation, are part of everyday life under capitalism as are the national oppression of migrants and nations and the oppression of women, young people and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and led by the working class, for she is the only class that has nothing to lose but their chains.

The revolution can not proceed peacefully because never before has a ruling class voluntarily surrendered their power. The road to liberation includes necessarily the armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasant republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in rank and file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods and schools – in councils. These councils elect and control the government and all other authorities and can always replace them.

Real socialism and communism has nothing to do with the so-called "real existing socialism" in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba or Eastern Europe. In these countries, a bureaucracy dominated and oppressed the proletariat.

The RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of workers and the oppressed. We combine this with a perspective of the overthrow of capitalism.

We work inside the trade unions and advocate class struggle, socialism and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is a layer which is connected with the state and capital via jobs and privileges. It is far from the interests and living circumstances of the members. This bureaucracy's basis rests mainly on the top, privileged layers of the working class - the workers' aristocracy. The struggle for the liberation of the working class must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their upper strata.

The RCIT strives for unity in action with other organizations. However, we are aware that the policy of social democracy and the pseudo-revolutionary groups is dangerous and they ultimately represent an obstacle to the

emancipation of the working class.

We fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. We fight for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

In a war between imperialist states we take a revolutionary defeatist position, i.e. we don't support neither side and advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class. In a war between an imperialist power (or its stooge) and a semi-colonial country we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed country.

The struggle against national and social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) must be led by the working class. We fight for revolutionary movements of the oppressed (women, youth, migrants etc.) based on the working class. We oppose the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism etc.) and strive to replace them by a revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class win. The construction of such a party and the conduct of a successful revolution as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky in Russia are a model for the revolutionary parties and revolutions also in the 21 Century.

For new, revolutionary workers' parties in all countries!
For a 5th Workers International on a revolutionary basis!
Join the RCIT!

*No future without socialism! No socialism without a revolution!
No revolution without a revolutionary party! ■*



