

And After the War?

The Prospects for Social Struggles in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine has thrown Eastern Europe into disorder, disrupting an already volatile world order. But what will follow the war? And how will the outcome shape the prospects for revolutionary movements in the region?

The war has created a fertile ground for nationalists and militarists to recruit in Ukraine, Russia, Poland, and elsewhere across Europe. The weaponry that NATO is sending into Ukraine and the surrounding regions will remain there for years to come, intensifying the body counts in future civil wars throughout the region modeled on the proxy wars in Donbas and Syria. The soldiers who survive the fighting will bring back the consequences of traumatic experiences, which some of them will revisit on their own communities—or on others' communities as mercenaries in future conflicts. Patriarchy and fundamentalism typically intensify as a consequence of warfare, as we have seen from Lebanon and Palestine to Iran and Afghanistan—and arguably, to a lesser extent, in the United States as well, following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

As Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy has acknowledged himself, this war is a step towards a world of permanent militarization, in which the Israeli model of militarized policing will become the norm and brute force will be the chief means of resolving political differences. Massive refugee populations displaced by wars and economic and ecological crises will be segregated according to national and ethnic hierarchies—received into welcoming homes, crowded into internment camps, or pushed back into the borderlands to die.

In response to all of this, anarchists hope to advance another vision of the future, establishing solidarity between anti-war, anti-nationalist, and anti-state movements across all borders and lines of difference. Rather than identifying with any government or capitalist coterie, pointing to the misdeeds of some to excuse the misdeeds of others, we aim to build the capacity to interrupt war and exploitation by means of grassroots action. Anticipating the challenges that social movements throughout the region will face after this war could help us to set our priorities.

With our Russian comrades, we have prepared a translation of the following article by Vladimir Platonenko exploring what the prospects will be for social struggle in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia after the war is over. You can read an English translation of an earlier article of his about the war [here](#). Though Platonenko takes for granted that Russia will be soundly defeated—which we hardly consider a foregone conclusion—we consider this text valuable in that it shows the dangers of identifying with the Ukrainian government and emphasizes the responsibility of Russian liberals for the situation in Russia today, which could be repeated all over again even if Putin is somehow ousted from power.

War and Social Struggle in Ukraine

The worst thing Putin has done in Ukraine [sic—presumably the author means “besides murdering, injuring, and displacing countless people”] is to reconcile the authorities with the people. The president has turned from an object of universal criticism into the Ukrainian Charles de Gaulle.¹ The general of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry offers to deliver himself to the Russian army in exchange for the release of civilians from the besieged city and becomes a national hero. The entire population of Ukraine, from the homeless to the oligarch, unites in a common struggle. It is the same as in the USSR in 1941, when Stalin called everyone “brothers and sisters” and people believed in his sincerity. If that war was a domestic war for the USSR, then this became a domestic war for Ukraine. Kharkov and Mariupol are perceived as Stalingrad, Leningrad or the Brest Fortress. Remember how Vysotsky sang about the Leningrad blockade? “Everyone was starving, even the prosecutor.” Well, not everyone starved, and none of the higher officials died of dystrophy. But in the memory of the people, it remains the way as the poet sang. The same will be said and sung about Mariupol or Kharkiv.

And when the war will be over, all the hardships will be blamed on it. The hungry and homeless will be reassured by the fact that they won. And the social Maidan [i.e., uprising], which is slowly brewing in Ukraine, will be postponed for a long time.²

It already happened after annexation of Crimea. On the Maidan [i.e., in 2014], many people said that after Yanukovich, we would have to deal with the oligarchs next. After Russia took Crimea, this was forgotten.³ “Not now. The fatherland is in danger.” Now it’s happening again, but in a much harsher tone.

To be fair, the contradictions between the authorities and the people, and the difference in the interests and goals of the upper and lower classes, have not disappeared. In the Poltava region, if I am not mistaken, they confiscated from the villagers... eleven Russian tanks (abandoned by the Russians). That is, the villagers were going to use these tanks as plows or tractors, and the Ukrainian army confiscated them. But for now, such contradictions are resolved in favor of the government—in the name of a common victory.

Ukraine has always been good at one thing: it was always normal to depose the ruler who displeased the people. This made it different from Muscovy (ancient Russia), where

¹ Charles de Gaulle was the army officer who headed the French government in exile during the Second World War and later suppressed the uprising of May 1968

² Maidan Nezalezhnosti (“Independence Square”) is the central square of Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine. It was the site of massive protests in 2004, during the so-called “Orange Revolution,” and again in 2013 through 2014 during the events that led to the Ukrainian Revolution of 2014.

³ As we wrote in 2014, “Powerful governments will not stand by and let common people get a taste for overthrowing them. They will be pressed to intervene, as Russia has in Ukraine, in hopes that war can trump insurrection. War is a way of shutting down possibilities—of changing the subject.”

the figure of the Tsar was sacred. The exceptions were the Time of Troubles, which was ended by the merchant (Minin) and the prince (Pozharsky). But in Ukraine, it has always been the rule that unpopular leaders are forced out. This Ukrainian tradition goes back at least to the Cossack times. How many Ukrainian Cossack atamans have paid with their positions, and sometimes with their lives, for “unpopular measures”! Whether this tradition will continue now is hard to say.

It is possible that it will. It is not only the Ukrainian army that is fighting the Russian army, but also the territorial defense units. That is to say: ordinary people—who now have weapons. They might keep them. They will feel involved in the victory and demand respect from the authorities. The authorities will not be able to simply scatter them into camps, like Stalin did with the front-line veterans of the Second World War.

But the authorities can trick the people by redirecting their anger from the state to the external enemy. This will be especially easy if Russia is defeated, but not finished off. Not to mention the fact that all this will happen after the victory. And before that, there will be a holy war, in which the people and the Party are one, are united. That is, the people and the government, in this case.

In Belarus

If in Ukraine, the war had reconciled the authorities with the people, or rather, the people with the authorities, then in Belarus it is rather the opposite. Lukashenko is not eager to go to war. He does not want to get involved in this showdown, either. However, he has to take part in it, even if only by permitting Putin’s army to pass through his territory. And the question of the Belarusian army joining the war remains open.

The people do not want war with Ukraine. They even organize sabotage on railroads. Moreover, Belarusian volunteers are already fighting on the side of Ukraine, formed into a separate unit. It’s clear that in the future, this will become the basis of the anti-Lukashenko army. One can imagine which side will receive the sympathy of the majority of the Belarusian people, if there is a war between the supporters and opponents of Lukashenko. Since the West does not recognize Lukashenko as the legitimate president, it must be assumed that the anti-Lukashenko army will not be short of food, equipment, or weapons. And most likely it will win. The question is what will happen in Belarus afterwards.

Belarusian liberals have shown their worthlessness by ruining the 2020 protests. However, this will most likely not prevent them from claiming their part in the victory (“We worked hard!”) and laying claim to a place in the government. The more so since the entire united West will be on their side.

There are practically no Leninists in Belarus. That niche is occupied by Lukashenko himself, who promised to preserve the welfare state in exchange for the obedience of the masses. Classical nationalists are also weak there—considering them his main enemies, Lukashenko has repressed everything associated with Belarusian culture. On the other

hand, there are “anarcho”-nationalists [sic].⁴ However, it’s hard for me to estimate how strong they are.

At the same time, up until the events of 2020, there was a fairly strong anarchist movement in Belarus. Unlike liberals, anarchists did not give flowers to riot police or urge others to do the same. No wonder many of them ended up behind bars. But even after that, as I understand it, there are quite a few anarchists in the Belarusian detachment fighting in Ukraine. At least, that’s what the photos show.

So, unless the Ukrainian authorities or the Belarusian opposition “dispose of” them (and most likely the Ukrainian authorities won’t need to, and the Belarusian opposition simply won’t be able to do so before the victory), then after the victory over Lukashenko, the anarchists could become an independent force in Belarus.

In Russia

The worst situation [in terms of future prospects] is in the Russian Federation. The most active, capable, and educated part of the population flees abroad, or is ground to dust in wars. Some of the soldiers who surrendered to the Ukrainians have gone over to the side of Ukraine and intend to fight on that side. But these people are too few to enter Moscow as liberators of Russia. The most they can hope for is that, in the event of the defeat of the Russian Federation, its government will agree to let them return to the country not as foreigners and national traitors, but as full citizens. At the most, they might be particularly respected citizens, but nothing more than that.

If Yulia Latynina is to be believed, there is a project to create a network of Russian emigrants, but what is behind that and where it will lead are not yet clear. The fact that the social Darwinist Latynina is pinning her hopes on this is more alarming than encouraging for supporters of social justice.

In today’s Russia, with its monarchist traditions, any sort of struggle against the current regime is strongly associated with Navalny and the liberals, on whom Navalny is most likely to place his bets, just as Yeltsin once did. This could lead to a repetition of the Yeltsin era, and then the Putin era. Let me remind you that it was Yeltsin and his liberal entourage who first ruined and robbed the Russian people, then appointed Putin to guard the loot.

This also means that it is the liberals who are directly responsible for Putin coming to power and for all the atrocities he perpetrated. However, they are determined to pin the blame on the common people and make them foot the bill, which the West will present to a defeated Russia.

It should be added that if in the wild 1990s, the Russian businessmen were saved from a new popular revolution by gangster strife, which killed off a significant part of the active population (and not the worst part, because in such strife, the first ones to die were the ones

⁴ Upon direct communication with the author and a comrade from Belarus, we have established that the group the author was referring to no longer exists. In 2015 and 2016, former anti-fascist hooligans made an effort to create an amalgam of anarchism and nationalism in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, but according to our sources, no vestiges of this remain there.

who retained a vestige of their humanity, whereas the worst scoundrels survived), now that part same of population will be ground up in the war (and in similar strife after it, when the soldiers who are accustomed to robbing and killing will return from the front).

In short, unless some “black swan” flies to the aid of the Russian people, Russia will repeat the Yeltsin-Putin three decades, after which the country will most likely perish [sic], except for Moscow and a few other regions, where there will be established a “thriving economy” with a 12-hour workday for the common people and elite restaurants and brothels for the oligarchs.

Possible Disintegration

Among other things, this “black swan” could be the breakup of the country into various regions. Neither Russian liberals nor the West want this, because then it will be unclear from whom to take reparations. Actually, the unwillingness to pay—literally as well as figuratively—for Moscow’s atrocities may become one of the reasons for various regions to separate. At the moment, such separation is impossible, because it would be quickly suppressed by the federal army, against which the regions simply have nothing to oppose. But after the defeat of Russia, the situation may change, as the federal army will be weakened and the regions will have their own local military formations.

If the country collapses, the monolith of vertical power will also collapse, and no one will be able to impose their model of economy on the whole country, from the Baltic to the Kuril Islands, as was done in Russia (it should be remembered that one of the chief reasons for the first Chechen war was the rejection by Chechnya of the Gaidar-Chubais model of privatization). We have already talked about the chance to avoid paying off the reparations (which the authorities will try to force on ordinary people, not corrupt officials). Finally, territorial disintegration will enable revolutionaries and other troublemakers to escape the persecution of the authorities, if necessary, by simply moving to a neighboring region—and, when necessary, to all gather in one region, the way that activists from different countries gathered for the Maidan.

But all this will only come to pass if the collapse follows the Latin American model, in which all the residents of the former province (whose borders do not coincide with ethnic borders) retain equal rights regardless of their language and origin, rather than the African model, in which members of one ethnic group consider the new country their own and all its other residents are (at best) assimilated, (at worst) exterminated, or else simply reduced to second-class citizens. In the latter case, instead of social struggle, we will get inter-ethnic conflict.

The secession of Ukraine took place according to the Latin American model; in modern Ukraine, there are as many people with Russian, Jewish, or even Armenian surnames as there are Ukrainian names among the soldiers of the Russian army that invaded Ukraine, while the discrimination of the Ivanovs and Koganovs in Ukraine exists only in the inflamed imaginations of those who listen to Solovyov and Simonyan [prominent Russian TV propagandists]. But the separation of Chechnya followed the second model described above: not

only Russians, but also representatives of other ethnic groups faced discrimination from the Chechens themselves. And right now, it's hard to say which of these possibilities would play out if the breakup of the Russian Federation were to take place.

This will depend on many factors, including ourselves—although, unfortunately, not just us.

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