

Ukraine

Another war, another victory for the state

Fifth Estate Collective

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As we write at the end of March, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is at full fury with deaths and destruction increasing daily. By the time you read this, the conflict will hopefully have ended. If not, any number of terrible scenarios may have taken place or are still continuing.

The best outcome will be the thwarting of Vladimir Putin's plans by Ukrainian resistance, but also by the overthrow of the Russian president by popular forces within Russia. The consequences of a victory for the invaders would be a disaster and only come at a horrendous price.

The plight of the people of Ukraine is presented with fully appropriate sympathy in 24/7 news cycles. However, it doesn't take much speculation to understand why this same type of coverage isn't afforded to the victims of U.S. wars of aggression, although they have purposefully inflicted exactly the same devastation on countries like Iraq and Afghanistan as the Russian army is currently raining down upon Ukraine. The current war is never mentioned without the adjective "brutal" placed in front of the noun as if the results of this one was uniquely horrible and different from the consequences of all wars.

The way the media direct people to sympathize with and feel sorrow for the Ukrainian victims of war, something not expressed for others, raises militarism to a positive feature of the situation rather than one of its causes, and portrays Putin as another Hitler. However, take away the crawler at the bottom of the screen and substitute the names of cities like Baghdad, Fullujah, Tripoli, Sana'a, or Gaza, and the extent of destruction is identical.

This time the "war criminal" is the ruler of the West's imperial enemy and the victims are white, thus the sympathy, solidarity, and horror expressed across the world to Ukraine is one never offered to the usual targets of the U.S. and its allies.

Who wins here? The weapons manufacturers, the U.S. and Canadian petroleum industry. NATO, and the West are willing to fight the Russians to the last Ukrainian, and see the Russian military dealt a blow similar to what they experienced in their defeat in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Nationalism and militarism win all round. It's understandable that Ukrainians want to defend their country under attack, but nationalists are taking advantage of this desire to justify the worst ideologies that bolster the nation state, ultimately the cause of all of this mess.

The grand schemes of rulers throughout history for power, wealth, land, and ideology have made civilization a bloody sword taking millions to their deaths. For the past two thousand years, whole populations have suffered constant outrages perpetrated by elites for whom militarism has been a way of life. Consider Carthage, the Crusader massacre of Jerusalem, periodic wars in medieval Europe, the genocide of native peoples by colonial forces, the world wars, the holocaust of European Jews, the Turkish genocide of Armenians.

This is the state; this is its legacy and its present.

The current situation can be seen as the affirmation of American militarism and its projection of armed force anywhere in the world at any time of its choosing. In liberal circles, suspicion of endless U.S. wars has evaporated,

curiously now only existing within the politics of the far-right wing. Liberals evince a newfound patriotism, expressing pride that the U.S. military is using its might this time for good. To them, the history of Ukraine began on the day of the invasion with no understanding of the role NATO and U.S. played in precipitating the crisis by extending NATO and surrounding Russia with a hostile military alliance. To bring up either the disparity in reaction to the victims of war, or to suggest that one ought to examine the causes of this conflict brings charges of being “pro-Putin” or “You sound like Trump.” The implied accusation of being “un-American” is dredged up from the 1950s.

There’s a mood in the U.S. similar to what was present in the country prior to its entry into World War I. The flags are flying, people are marching, doubters are berated, the war drums are beating. The symbols of war drive men to war.

In the meantime, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has moved their Doomsday Clock up to 100 seconds to midnight. Environmental disasters, global warming, social blight and threats to all living creatures, including the nuclear danger, are rooted in the worldwide capitalist crisis.

Nevertheless, there are a few rays of hope piercing the fog of war. Not everyone is just listening to or watching the controlled media, in Russia or North America and elsewhere. A lot of people are actively seeking out other sources of info, including self-created ones and personal connections. States and corporate powers are not succeeding in monopolizing the information war. In the West and in the East, more people than might be expected have publicly and personally rejected the patriotic narratives and right-wing justifications, even when losing so much.

The last decades have seen the flowering of a wide variety of non-hierarchical grassroots resistance through collective action, solidarity and mutual aid projects in many parts of the world, including Ukraine and Russia. We need to remember that past movements like these have sometimes been able to topple dictatorships, remake societies, and turn the world upside down.

They very well might succeed in doing so again.

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