Stand with Ukraine: UK TUC backs their right to resist Russian aggression

Fred Leplat reports on the UK TUC Congress in Liverpool

The TUC congress on 12 September adopted overwhelmingly a motion in solidarity with the people Ukraine in their war of liberation from Putin's invasion of their country. Three major unions, the RMT, the UCU and the NEU, abstained while the FBU spoke against the motion. It commits the TUC to support "The immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territories occupied since 2014" and "A peaceful end to the conflict that secures the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the support and self-determination of the Ukrainian people". The motion also states that the TUC notes "That those who suffer most in times of war are the working class, and that the labour movement must do all it can to prevent conflict; however, that is not always possible".

TUC Resolution Affirms Solidarity with Ukrainian People

The position now adopted by the TUC, which has unions representing over 5.5 million workers, is a huge boost for the morale of the Ukrainian people, and the Ukrainian unions in particular. The TUC policy is now to support "The full restoration of labour rights in Ukraine and a socially-just reconstruction that … rejects deregulation and privatisation," which is the opposite of what the Tory government was pushing at its Ukraine Reconstruction conference in June with its neoliberal emphasis on private investment and reforms.

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The TUC resolution is pro-Ukraine, not pro-war. However it was caricatured by Andrew Murrayof the Stop the war Coalition as "a call for the trade unions to align in support of the most hard-line elements among NATO policy-makers and push for the war to continue until Russian surrender". The StWC denounced the vote as "A vote for war that Sunak and Starmer will welcome", while the SWP declares that the "TUC backs war and clears the way for more arms spending." These responses fall into the binary trap set by Blair and Bush to win support for the war in Iraq: "Either you support the war or you support Saddam Hussein." It is entirely possible to support the people of Ukraine in their armed resistance, be critical of Zelensky's neoliberal government and also oppose NATO.

No to NATO Expansion and Arms Escalation

Internationalists cannot condemn Ukrainians because they are using every means available for their self-defence. If the war is one mainly for liberation of the country from Russian imperialism, Western imperialism is also involved for its own geostrategic interests. Of course, NATO and Western imperialist countries have not suddenly been converted to being fighters for democracy. They happily support and sell arms to many dictatorships, such as Saudi Arabia, provided they are loyal to their interests. While the TUC motion is silent on the role of NATO, conversely, it does not repeat the Starmer position of "unshakable" support for NATO. The spurious accusation that support for Ukraine also means support for NATO and militarism should be unashamedly rejected. Describing the conflict as only a "proxy war" by NATO removes from the Ukrainians any self-determination, and erases Putin's responsibility for the military aggression and the brutal treatment of Ukrainian civilians.

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The position adopted by the TUC is a welcome contrast to that adopted a few days earlier by the G20 summit in India. The G20 stepped back from the support they gave to Ukraine in 2022. The G20 summit last year declared that it "deplores in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and demands its complete and unconditional withdrawal from the territory of Ukraine". This year, it did not directly mention Russia or Ukraine, and stated vaguely that states should "refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition."

Eighteen months after the beginning of the war, there seems to be no quick end. While the Ukrainian army has made some gains recently, it has not yet routed the Russian troops. Arms continue to be supplied by the West, but not in sufficient quantities. Internationally banned cluster munitions and dangerously toxic depleted uranium shells are being supplied to Ukraine. These risk the war escalating into a direct inter-imperialist conflict.

The Ukrainians desperately want peace and freedom. But a ceasefire for peace negotiations without simultaneously a withdrawal of Russian troops is in reality and annexation of parts of Ukraine. This will not bring lasting peace. While there have been several attempts at peace negotiations, some were not encouraged by Western leaders who see the war as an opportunity to marginalise Russia. However, Russia's position has remained that any peace plan can only proceed from Ukraine's recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the regions it annexed from Ukraine in September 2022, and that Ukraine should demilitarise and "de-Nazify". While Ukraine, quite reasonably, wants recognition of its territorial integrity along internationally recognised borders. Putin is unlikely to make any moves for peace any time soon as he has already suffered two defeats. He failed in a quick war for regime change in Kyiv, and NATO has expanded further with Finland and Sweden joining the alliance. Putin's naked aggression and

invasion of Ukraine has been a gift to NATO which has found a new purpose in a fight for democracy, replacing the failed war against terrorism. Hence the push for increases in defence spending and the possible return of US nuclear weapons to Britain, both of which should be opposed.

The Ukrainians have made tremendous sacrifices and suffered enormous casualties with over 70,000 dead and 120,000 injured. Russia's casualties are even higher, with close to 300,000 of which 120,000 have been killed, according to the Guardian. A staggering total of 500,000. Apart from the ecological devastation, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and homes, Ukraine is now the most mined country in the world.

The mood of Ukrainians is resigned and sombre, but support for the war effort is still there. A Gallup poll conducted a year ago in September 2022, showed that 70% of Ukrainians wanted to continue the war with Russia until victory. Political solidarity and humanitarian aid are necessary to demonstrate that the Ukrainians have not been abandoned. There have been many spontaneous and independent efforts of practical support for Ukrainians. Today, 64% of Europeans agree with purchasing and supplying military equipment to Ukraine (it is 93% in Sweden). With the US presidential elections in 2024, Trump's continuing electoral threat and his isolationist policies are affecting the mood in Washington. How long will NATO's support for Ukraine last if the economic cost for western capitalism is too high a cost to pay for the Ukrainians fight for democracy? That's why it was always right to say "don't trust NATO". No peace deal should be imposed on Ukraine. As long as the Ukrainians are prepared to fight, we should be in solidarity with them.

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What you can do:

- Circulate the motion from the TUC, and amend it as necessary.
- Invite Ukrainian trade-unionists and socialists to speak to your organisation.
- Twin your workplace or trade-union with a similar organisation in Ukraine.
- Raise funds for medical and humanitarian aid.
- Support the anti-war activists being persecuted and imprisoned in Russia.
- Affiliate to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. info@ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org www.ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org
- or in Scotland
- uscscotland@gmail.com https://ukrainesolidarityscot.wordpress.com/https://www.facebook.com/groups/USCScotland



Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Fringe meeting at TUC Liverpool. Included in the picture: Maria Exall TUC President, Gary Smith GMB National Secretary, Barbara Plant GMB President, Chris Kitchen NUM General Secretary, Simon Weller Assistant General Secretary

ASLEF, John Moloney PCS Assistant General Secretary.

This article is reposted from Anticapitalist Resistance: https://anticapitalistresistance.org/stand-with-ukraine-tuc-backs-their-right-to-resist-russian-aggression/

Headline picture: Ukraine refugees hold GMB We Stand with Ukraine placard, George Square, Glasgow, August 2023 (M Picken)