Building International Solidarity for Ukraine: Three Perspectives

The Russian left wing website Posle (После – 'After') recently published three perspectives on Building International Solidarity for Ukraine, from the UK state, from Poland and from the USA, that ecosocialist.scot is republishing below. You can find about Scottish solidarity with Ukraine from the website of the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine the Western left split into two camps. Yet, attempts to build a broad solidarity movement with Ukraine have been underway since February 24. International activists talk about their work:

Simon Pirani [UK], honorary professor, University of Durham

His most recent book on Russia is *Communist Dissidents in Early Soviet Russia* (2023)

I have always believed that support for people resisting imperialist violence is central to socialism. It was the US war in Vietnam that first moved me to political action, when I was a teenager. Supporting Ukrainian resistance to Russian imperialism is consistent with supporting Vietnamese resistance then, and supporting Palestinian resistance to Israeli apartheid. For me, the difference is that Ukraine is closer, in the sense that I have been travelling there, and to Russia, for the last thirty years. (I worked in both countries as a journalist and doing academic research.)

After the invasion in February last year, the most effective responses from the labour movement and social movements in which I am involved were the direct ones. Some young people from the UK and other European countries travelled to Ukraine to join volunteer units; a much larger number of people organised material aid for front-line areas. Personally I supported those efforts, and played a small part in trying to highlight the situation in the Russian-occupied areas.

In the labour movement, perhaps the clearest voice in support of Ukrainian resistance was that of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). We have no deep mines left in the UK, but the union – which historically was one of the strongest, until its defeat in the big strike over pit closures in 1984-85 – continues to support former miners and their communities. It has a historical connection to Ukraine: links were established in 1990 between the miners union in Durham, in north east England, with the Independent Miners Union of Ukraine, in the first place in Pavlograd, in the western Donbass.

Straight after the invasion, the NUM and other unions sent more than £20,000, and supported trade unionists who drove vehicles full of medical equipment and other supplies to Ukraine, and left them with miners' union activists there. There have been at least seven deliveries of that kind. Along with the NUM and the train drivers union ASLEF, a strong source of support has been a cross-party group, Senedd Cymru [Welsh parliament] Together for Ukraine. The chief legal officer of Wales, Mick Antoniw, is a labour movement activist of Ukrainian family background, and has travelled several times to deliver vehicles, with fellow parliamentarians and trade union representatives.

Other unions have participated in, or at least declared support for, such solidarity actions, including those representing civil servants, teachers, university staff and health workers: efforts to win them over have been coordinated by the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, which works with the

Confederation of Independent Unions of Ukraine (KVPU).

The USC last month also organised a conference, Another Ukraine is Possible, at which labour, feminist and anti-capitalist perspectives on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine were advanced, in contrast to the neoliberal slant of the government-level talks also held in London. Another initiative, that I have myself been involved in, has been to raise the profile of Solidarity Zone, the group supporting Russians who take direct action against the war, for example by translating and circulating material.

In terms of actual material aid delivered, all these initiatives by labour movement and anti-capitalist movements are smaller than the mountains of support given to Ukrainian people by civil society in a wider sense. Community groups, churches, voluntary associations, charities, and e.g. Ukrainians living in the UK and their friends have not only raised very large sums of money but also taken vehicles and other aid to Ukraine. On the other hand, the UK's support for Ukrainian refugees, or for Russians fleeing war and repression, has been very limited. While the government, for cynical political reasons, made it easier for Ukrainians to get to the UK than it is for most refugees from other wars, it is still difficult. The number of Ukrainian refugees here is negligible compared to Poland, Germany or other countries in continental Europe.

In my view, in the UK there are two problems that we face, in building a broad Ukraine solidarity campaign. The first is that, for reasons we all understand about inter-imperialist rivalries, the UK government has steadfastly supported Ukraine militarily, e.g. with weapons supplies. This has given the most right-wing UK government in decades the opportunity to pose as lovers of freedom. And this has its effect on society: the media reports Ukraine sympathetically; president Zelensky appears smiling for the cameras with our ministers, who to people here represent austerity and racism. The hypocrisy of

the British ruling class, who for so long prevailed over an empire that dripped with blood (and who have spent the last thirty years gearing its financial system to the benefit of Russian kleptocrats), is obvious – especially to migrant communities whose suffering has been shaped by British and other western imperialism.

There is a danger that this hypocrisy can cause resentment and division. People in the UK who face constant pressure from the state for supporting Palestinian rights, or who deal daily with the consequences of the state's racist migration policies, can not fail to be struck by the state's "favouritism" towards Ukrainians, or, for another example, political refugees from Hong Kong. Socialists and labour movement activists who support Ukrainian resistance have answered this in the best way possible – by seeking to build alliances between Ukraine's struggle and others resisting other imperialism. This is a work in progress.

The other issue is that, as in other western countries, there are post-Stalinist tendencies that in practice oppose solidarity with Ukraine. A tiny handful of pro-Putin extremists issue soundbites à la Solovyev or Rogozin. But more numerous groups describe themselves as "anti imperialists", seeing the Kremlin as the lesser evil and Ukraine as a tool of the western powers, or "pacifists" who issue disingenuous calls for peace talks, without e.g. withdrawal of Russian troops, and repeat Kremlin talking points about NATO being to blame for the war. So in the Labour party, the left minority is divided: John McDonnell (effectively deputy Labour leader when Jeremy Corbyn was leader), has supported "the provision of weapons to Ukrainians to defend themselves"; Corbyn himself is against that.

> ***Just as the sore of the illegitimate, Russian-supported "republics" festered in the body of Ukrainian society, so reactionary forms of ideology that supported them gnawed away at the labour movement across Europe***

Looking back, I think that, collectively, those in the labour movement with connections to Russia and Ukraine did far too little after 2014 to explain our case. This socalled "anti-imperialism" was already vocal, with regard both to Ukraine and Syria. Like others, I made individual efforts to oppose it (see e.g. here, here, here and here) but these efforts were inadequate. Just as the sore of the illegitimate, Russian-supported "republics" festered in the body of Ukrainian society, so reactionary forms of ideology that supported them gnawed away at the labour movement across Europe.

> ***Hopefully the very widespread, and very human, feeling among ordinary people in the UK, that Ukrainians deserve solidarity against a brutal, violent onslaught, will serve as the background for a new clarification of what socialist anti-imperialism actually means***

One good thing that has happened in the last 18 months is that these issues have come out into the open and been discussed more widely. Hopefully the very widespread, and very human, feeling among ordinary people in the UK, that Ukrainians deserve solidarity against a brutal, violent onslaught, will serve as the background for a new clarification of what socialist anti-imperialism actually means.

Zofia Malisz [Poland], Razem International Office

Razem is a left party in Poland with six members of parliament and structures at home and abroad. We support the sovereignty of Ukraine as well as the efforts of the Belarusian and Russian people to democratise their countries since our party was formed in 2015 (see "Polityka wschodnia"). After the Russian invasion we launched and co-organised several campaigns, often in cooperation with Sotsialnyi Rukh, to gain support on the European and global left for sending weapons

that the Ukrainian people needed to defend themselves.

We co-founded the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU), which is so active today. There we worked within the feminist "right to resist" group. Our co-leader Magdalena Biejat and other female left coalition MPs filed a motion in the Sejm to expedite access to abortion for Ukrainian refugees who had been raped. Unfortunately the right-wing parliamentary majority rejected it. Other initiatives of ENSU also include a visit to Lviv in 2022 with various left parliamentarians. Right after the invasion we gathered members of Nordic and Eastern European left parties in Warsaw and issued a statement in support of Ukraine, condemning the invasion and appealing for sanctions against Russia. Our cooperation on a range of issues including cancelling Ukrainian external debt has made a difference, in the form of several legislative efforts in Europe and the US in favour of supporting the cancellation. This was a result of broad social media campaigns, meetings, press conferences and articles on the topic that we took direct part in, initiated or co-ordinated.

We took part in countless meetings, live and remote in 2022, with the global left, to challenge Russian propaganda regarding the invasion and Ukrainian statehood. We confronted falsehoods embedded on the left, particularly within the Western "peace" movement. We did our best to explain the complexities of our regional situation that many were disappointingly ignorant about or chose to ignore – despite decades-long relationships. As a consequence of such unwillingness to engage with the challenges facing the Eastern European left and to support Ukrainian sovereignty, we decided to leave Progressive International and Diem25 shortly after the invasion.

We do feel the Polish, Ukrainian and Russian opposition left movements have unique contributions to make to the global left. Our traditions and the challenges we face, be it

geopolitical or stemming from the transformation, are different, so are our solutions and ways of communication. Much can be learned from us. One of the hardest challenges is the neoliberal ideologisation in our societies. Due to that we see the great risk that rebuilding Ukraine entails – we believe, together with our partners in Ukraine, that it should be rebuilt for the benefit of the people, not foreign corporations or domestic oligarchs, with great focus on social infrastructure and support for workers, women as well as on nurturing bottom up communal organising that grew strong during the war. Our politicians have been communicating this constantly: there can be no sell-out of Ukraine to corporations in exchange for weapons. These days we put most of our efforts for Ukraine into campaigning for socially oriented rebuilding.

> ***We do feel the Polish, Ukrainian and Russian opposition left movements have unique contributions to make to the global left***

Razem also wants to offer to millions of Ukrainian refugees in Poland our vision of a safe, environmentally sustainable welfare state for everyone. A vision that we believe we can realise together both in Poland and in Ukraine. We want to show that Ukraine, in order to rebuild itself, needs its workers to return to stable working conditions with expanded labour rights. It needs its veterans to heal and to receive support from a well funded public services sector. Its children need to be able to grow up with the prospect of a planet that is not only livable, but thriving. We need Ukrainian victory for that, as well as a great deal of left cooperation and campaigning together for social Ukraine. We continue paving the way for that with our partners, both within the Central-Eastern European Green-Left Alliance organisation including Ukrainian partners that we have been building (that is launching at the moment). We also work with partners on the Western left who are willing to engage and to

develop concrete proposals of rebuilding plans that challenge the liberal plans (e.g. many activists in the UK and some Labour politicians).

There is broad consensus in Poland, as you know, regarding condemning the invasion as well as political and military help for Ukraine. There are no disagreements on that within the left in Poland. We are a political force though that keeps a watchful eye on the government's attitude and possible emerging far right threats to Ukrainian refugees. We also criticize any attempts to sacrifice human rights, the right to due process etc., regarding whatever issue concerning Russian citizens on Polish soil.

John Reimann and Cheryl Zuur [USA],

co-chairs Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign

Supporting Ukraine is the concrete expression of the number one responsibility for any socialist. That responsibility is international working class solidarity. But that is not just some moral responsibility; it is directly connected to the class struggle at home.

We see Putin's invasion of Ukraine as a decisive step in the general world process of the rise of extreme right wing nationalism, bigotry and counterrevolution. The more Putin succeeds, the more that process advances. We saw that with the Assad/Putin led counterrevolution in Syria which played a big role in the setback of the whole Arab Spring. And the Arab Spring did, in fact, inspire workers and young people around the world. The result of its defeat (for now) has been, among other things, the increase of religious reaction – Islamic fundamentalism in this case.

Here in the United States, Trump used Islamic fundamentalism

and Islamophobia as a major tool to get elected in 2016. Once in office, his first major initiative was to, in effect, bar Muslim people from entering the United States. This is an example of how the Putin-led counterrevolution had an effect on politics here in the United States.

Trump supports Putin not only because he served as a money launderer for the Russian oligarchy for many years. His support is also because of political affinity. That is also why extreme right wing politicians, even outright racists and fascists like *America First* and individuals like Matt Heimbach, support Putin. If Putin's imperialist invasion succeeds even in part, it will strengthen these forces and further drive forward global reactionary movements.

Finally, if we as socialists and as working class activists ignore this massive attack on the Ukrainian people, what are we saying to US workers? We would be telling workers "think only of yourselves in the most immediate sense. Think only of your own paycheck. Don't think about the wider issues that directly affect our lives." It would be no different from saying that oppression of women, or people of color or LGBTQ people is not a matter for all workers to oppose. It would be impossible to help strengthen the working class with that attitude, never mind to build a truly working class socialist movement.

As a result of this, a small group of us founded the Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign shortly after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine started. (In reality, Putin's military invasion of Ukraine started in 2014!). We base ourselves on several points of unity, including the demand that in order to fight the invaders Ukraine should receive all the weapons it needs and with no strings attached. That means we criticize Biden not because he is sending arms to Ukraine but, on the contrary, because he is too hesitant and putting too many handcuffs on Ukraine, on how it may use these arms. That is an unusual position for socialists to take, but it is not unprecedented.

During the Spanish Civil War, US socialists called on the US to send arms to the Spanish republicans who were fighting fascism, and during WWII no socialist in the U.S. would have opposed the US's sending arms to the Soviet Union to fight the Nazis.

The Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign has a lively presence on social media, including a Facebook group with over 630 members and almost 2,000 followers on Twitter. Both of these present news and analyses related to the war in Ukraine. We have a linktree with quite a few public resources. We also have regular public Zoom forums on topics such as the environmental aspects of the war in Ukraine, the Iranian revolution, whether Russia is fascist (with Ilya Budraitskis), the present political situation in Ukraine, and coming up a presentation on the Holodomor. Recordings of those forums are available on our youtube channel.

One of the most important discussions we had was a two part series on "fascist ideas on the left". That was a discussion on how and why the ideas of the far right, including even fascist ideas, have come to permeate the socialist movement. This is vitally important because – we have to admit it – the majority of the socialist movement and the "left" in general supports or at least apologizes and makes excuses for Putin's invasion of Ukraine. We explicitly decided to include "Socialist" in our name because we believe it is vital to reclaim socialism from this betrayal.

This betrayal is not accidental. It relates to the generally low political level of the US working class, a working class that has never had its own political party and that has been under attack, both ideologically and practically, for many decades. This ideological attack has been carried out not only by the capitalist class, but also from our very own leaders – every wing of the union leadership – who have also collaborated in helping the capitalists drive down the living conditions of US workers.

So, while the majority of US workers support Ukraine, they do so passively. “It’s not for me (us) to play an active, independent role in politics,” is the attitude.

In addition to our regular forums, the Ukraine Socialist Solidarity Campaign has mobilized in the streets where and when we can. We have participated in wider street mobilizations in support of Ukraine, for example a unity march organized by Iranian Americans in San Francisco. We have also mobilized to counter the pro-Putin propaganda of the “left”, such as Code Pink and various “socialists.” We also have done some fundraising for Ukraine, including selling t-shirts we designed, and a member of ours actually carried medical supplies to Ukraine last year. We are currently encouraging unions to pass a resolution we produced calling for full support – including arms – for Ukraine and we also have a petition calling for the IAEA to take over operation of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (you can sign it here).

We are still a very small group of activists and, can hardly have a major effect on objective events. What is needed is a renewed uprising of the working class in the United States and globally. We hope to help prepare the way by trying to clarify some of the most vital political issues of the day, many of which revolve around the fascistic imperialist invasion of Ukraine. That and building support for Ukraine to the maximum degree we can.

It is an honor and a privilege to work with and be associated with those brave Ukrainian and Russian comrades (as well as others) who are fighting against the Putin-led counterrevolution. We think that, together with a renewed worker uprising, this sort of collaboration in both the ideological and the practical realms will be the basis for the rebirth of a new, healthy, working class oriented socialist movement.

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Razem: Building a left alternative in Poland

*It is not often realised that among Scotland's population at the time of the 2011 census **Poland** was the largest non-UK country of birth, writes Mike Picken in this introduction for ecosocialist.scot.*

This was because of significant migration into Scotland during the period, now closed by the Tory Brexit, when Scotland as part of the EU was a member of the single market and free movement between EU states was possible. More recent data from 2021 in England & Wales indicates that Poland is the second largest country of birth there, after India. It should also be remembered that the xenophobic-fuelled Brexit referendum produced not only [the assassination of a Labour MP by a racist extremist opposed to EU migration](), but the [murder of a Polish-born man in Essex]() and the [tragic suicide of a Polish-born young woman in Cornwall following racist taunts]().

Poland transitioned to EU membership in 2004 and was by far

the largest of the former-soviet bloc eastern european states to do so (it is currently the fifth largest EU member state – after the western european states of Germany, France, Italy and the Spanish state).

But the transition from totalitarian stalinism to free market capitalism was fraught with contradictions. Despite the government of the right wing 'Law and Justice Party' and the rise of far right movements in Poland, there has also been the growth of a small but significant new broad left wing party – Razem ("Together" – also known as "Lewica Razem" – "Left Together"), formed in 2015 and now holding six seats in the Polish parliament, the Sejm (elected in 2019 as part of a left of centre coalition). As a left wing party, Razem has had to walk a difficult path between being critical of the capitalist and western imperialist basis of the EU and NATO institutions, while being understanding of the impact of stalinist totalitarianism on Polish society and the threat posed by Russian imperialism following the invasion of Ukraine. Razem champions the Kurdish struggle in Poland and is opposed to NATO's military interventions (see below). But Razem is also highly critical of many western leftist organisations who have abandoned the Ukrainian people in order to promote what has been called 'the anti-imperialism of idiots' by Ukraine 'Social Movement' left wing activist Taras Bilous. Razem has terminated its association with both the Progressive International and DIEM25 movements because of their refusal to defend unequivocally the Ukrainian people.

ecosocialist.scot is republishing below a wide ranging interview with a leading representative of Razem's international office, Zofia Malisz. There is much to learn for us in Scotland from this interview, particularly about the need to puncture the sometimes uncritical enthusiasm for the EU that exists in Scotland with an ecosocialist and left wing message, but also how to put across a consistent anti-imperialist message that has real resonance with the

populations of Eastern Europe.

The interview was first published by the Australian ecosocialist Green Left – this version is as republished by International Viewpoint.

Razem: Building a left alternative in Poland

Polish left-wing party Razem (Together) International Office member Zofia Malisz spoke to Green Left's Federico Fuentes about the party's history, Polish politics and Razem's views on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (*Green Left*, 10 January 2023.)

Could you tell us about Razem's history and politics?

Razem was formed in 2015 by a group of leftist activists with years of experience in the Polish green and feminist movements, along with members of the Young Socialists.

The impetus for creating a new party was two-fold.

One was the frustration that emerged under the liberal Donald Tusk government (2007–14). Whenever voices started to demand the government focus on social spending instead of cuts and privatisations, Tusk's response was to say Poland was still in its transformation stage [towards a market economy] and that now was not the time to build up a welfare state.

Frustration grew as neoliberal policies were implemented at breakneck speed to indulge business elites, while people were denied even modest social benefits and public services were being dismantled.

All this occurred as anti-austerity protests were taking place in Greece, something we supported and that inspired Razem.

The other major factor was the protests against the Iraq war and against Poland's participation in the occupation of Afghanistan. Several activists who went on to build Razem came from these protest movements.

The revelations of alleged illegal US prisons in Poland used to torture al-Qaeda members created huge outrage. Seeing the Polish government bow down to US imperialism unchallenged – and in fact encouraged by the mainstream, including former Solidarność activists – fuelled frustration on the left.



Razem was formed as an expression of this anger and frustration that had built up during the transformation process.

This particularly still concerns the young. Unlike the old Communist establishment or the new liberal elites aligned with business, they did not get the opportunity to enrich themselves during the transformation period.

Entering professional life, let alone starting a family, has become – and still is – a very difficult thing if you are living precariously.

Our co-leaders Magda Biejat and Adrian Zandberg have been highlighting the housing situation, particularly as rent and real estate prices have risen dramatically.

Poland is also facing depopulation, with the abortion ban discouraging women from getting pregnant and high cost of living pressures, which prevent young people from starting an independent life.

In terms of Razem's politics, I would say one difference

between Razem and much of the Western left is that we do not use ideologised language and instead communicate left values organically.

This is because, after the 1990s [with the fall of the Communist regime], even using the word “socialism” became problematic. There was a backlash that the right wing and neoliberals gladly exploited to discredit any ideas of a social state.

This happened despite the fact that Poland’s socialist tradition is much older than the Eastern Bloc’s existence and played a hugely significant and positive role in the building of the Polish independent state. Not to mention that, contrary to what conservative ideologues want you to believe, the ideals of Solidarność were socialist.

Razem was [also] inspired by the modern left approach adopted by Podemos, who demonstrated how to communicate socialist ideas in a different way.

[Podemos] showed that it was very important to find new ways to break up right-wing duopolies. In the case of Polish politics, we have a duopoly between the liberal and conservative right that dominates the scene.

We had to first bring back the left and insert left issues into the centre of Polish political debate. We had to bring back social protest and unionising into everyday Polish political practice – and we succeeded. These were our motivations.

Since then we have engaged in an, at times dramatic, fight for space on the terrain of this duopoly. The duopoly manifests itself as a war of right-wing tribes that is a source of sustenance to their elites. So it was vital for us to avoid the trap of engaging in empty arguments.

Polish liberals reduce every social-political question to

whether this helps defeat the conservatives, and vice versa, while never considering any problems on its merit. The Polish people are tired of this ritualistic fighting.

They appreciate the fact that our six MPs instead focus on talking about the issues. Parliamentary speeches by Adrian Zandberg, are something of a hotly anticipated public event because they give a rare sense of getting real among all this ruckus. They resonate because there is anger and people want solutions and real action. And they know they can depend on us for those.

People value Razem MPs showing up early at a strike to support workers' demands and to facilitate bringing the entitled bosses to the table. This is where we were able to make a difference in several industrial actions in recent years.

Poland is often grouped as part of a conglomerate of far-right authoritarian countries in Eastern Europe. How accurate is this? What can you tell us about the current government?

The same year Razem was formed, a conservative Christian government was elected. They found that the key to winning was to offer something that people wanted, some kind of social benefit – in this case a child allowance – but which the liberals had been refusing to give.

The conservative government only secured a majority because it incorporated social elements into their agenda.

Polish society, when asked about the policies they prefer, most often point to a form of social democracy with solid public services. The conservatives have exploited this need to their political benefit – but have clearly failed to deliver any comprehensive social agenda.

In any case, it is clear that to grab power they did not

campaign on banning abortion or dismantling the judicial branch of the state. But right after they came to power, they attacked human rights and the state's institutions. They started stirring up culture wars in later campaigns, for example, scapegoating and harassing LGBT people.

Yes, these policies are supported by the Catholic Church. The conservative majority owes the Church huge favours – a lot of this stuff happens as a form of a clientelist exchange between the Church and the government. But these are not policies that have majority support.

Polls show the majority of the Polish people want legalisation of abortion and civil unions for same-sex couples. Polish society has been secularising dramatically in recent years. The conservatives have been losing this battle and the rabid reaction of fundamentalist groups embedded in the government's environment reflects this.

Unlike in Hungary, the Polish government has not been able to undermine the electoral system, and while attempts to take over the judiciary have been largely successful, they faced popular protest.

Moreover, due to the European Union's resistance to accepting these illegal reforms, the government has hit a wall of Polish EU-enthusiasm.

This is a major difference with Hungary: the government here was not able to find an easy way around the fact that people won't support any hint of "Polexit".

Neither will Razem, by the way, as we believe the EU badly needs social and democratic reform, but that Poland should stay and contribute to fostering integration and partnership on the continent.

This fact about Poland being pro-European integration helped defeat the government's attacks on our checks and balances.

The result was that all the Orbanite moves the government did, including the persecution of women and LGBT people, sparked a wave of unprecedented protest. The protests against the abortion ban were huge and spanned all levels of society.

This caused a dramatic dip in the polls and the conservatives are unlikely to win a parliamentary majority in this year's elections.

As to the idea of Eastern Europe as essentially authoritarian and full of far-right nationalists, I would say this is the result of decades of dismissing Eastern Europe agency. It is often the default, convenient portrayal in the media that flatters egos in the West.

We all know what trouble Western European countries are in regarding right-wing threats, look at Italy or France with [Giorgia] Meloni and [Marine] Le Pen, or the recent plot by German extremists to overthrow the system.

But somehow the global media and Russian propaganda manage to draw exclusive attention to right-wing authoritarian tendencies in Eastern Europe, obscuring the fact that there are left movements and a progressive civil society, and disregarding the emancipatory and democratising impulse that is well alive in the people. This contributes to the image of Eastern Europe as an especially conservative backwater, hostile to progressive ideas, which is not really the case and certainly is not a constant.

Of course, there are elements of this, but it is being incredibly exaggerated in the West, including within the Western left. Look at Slovenia with Levica, Croatia with Mozemo, Latvia with Progresivie or Poland with Razem, and you will discover inspiring left movements implementing progressive change in their country and municipal politics – and there will be more surprises like that in the future which should be acknowledged.

Particularly regarding Ukraine, it is vital movements such as Social Movement are supported in the context of resistance and rebuilding after Russian aggression is defeated.

How did Razem respond to Putin's invasion of Ukraine? Why does Razem insist on the need to come to grips with Russian imperialism?

Razem had no doubts about how to react given our countries' common historic experience with Russian imperialism. We had absolutely no doubts that this invasion represented an existential threat to Ukraine, that there could be no compromise, and that our party's reaction was crucial.

Unfortunately, we were very disappointed with progressive organisations, including ones that at the time we belonged to, that kept silent right up to and after the invasion, and even after the Bucha massacre.

This was disappointing but also, I admit, we may have been a bit blind to an obvious tendency that exists within part of the left to overemphasise US imperialism while letting Russian imperialism off the hook. It quickly became clear a big part of that left is not able to accept what for us are two existential issues: that Ukraine is a sovereign state and that there is such a thing as Russian imperialism.

In contrast, representatives of the left in Poland (Razem), Finland (Left Alliance), Lithuania (Left Alliance), Czech Republic (Alliance For The Future; The Left) and Romania (Democracy and Solidarity Party) met in Warsaw on March 8 with representatives of Ukrainian left organisation Social Movement to listen to them and ask them what they needed. The Danish left (Red-Green Alliance) was not present at the meeting but later indicated their support.

It became clear that we should campaign, first, to support the left and Ukraine's armed resistance. This was done against considerable pushback from the so-called anti-war movement in

imperial or post-imperial Western societies.

We often found that Ukrainian leftists had to fight even for their right to speak at events organised by the Western left. So this was a struggle and remains a vital point: to assert the existence and amplify the voice of the Ukrainian left. Their voice, once heard, inevitably cuts through all propaganda smokescreens – they lead a righteous fight for self-determination against an imperialist aggressor, no doubt about it.

Since then, the unity initiated in Warsaw has extended to other Nordic and Central European left parties, and more recently to left groups in the Balkans. We are building a network to share information not only about our common experience with regards to Russian imperialism but also regarding the process of harsh neoliberal transformation in states of the former Eastern Bloc.

Together with Social Movement and other allies such as the Portuguese Left Bloc or the Swedish Left Party we also launched a campaign to cancel Ukraine's debt, which is restricting Ukraine's war efforts and the ability to maintain its economy afloat. We have had some successes: a bill has been passed in the US House of Representatives calling on the US government to influence lenders on behalf of Ukraine, and the issue has also been raised in the UK and European parliament.

This is a campaign we hope to build on as an example of concrete solidarity and outward campaigning. We prefer to offer concrete solidarity, work with parties, trade unions and movements that are accountable to voters, members and the public.

Debates on realist geopolitics regarding multipolarity perhaps drive book sales, Twitter likes and invitations to panel debates, but they do not help the Ukrainian people who fight

off genocidal aggression of a neighbour who wagering on neocolonialism in the 21st century.

How do you view the issue of NATO expansionism?

We are clear that the influence of Western militarism is not welcome in Poland. But we recognise that we are in a complex situation. Unlike the left that operates in the heart of an empire, the left in our part of Europe cannot afford to take a purely ideological stance that is divorced from the security realities of the peoples of our region.

On the one hand, given the lack of a proper European security architecture, NATO currently represents the only guarantee of protection for Polish citizens. The vast majority of Poles want this protection, because they know the threat Russian imperialism poses. That is why I do not think that we can honestly talk about NATO expansionism in our region. Instead, what we had was countries desperately applying to join NATO in the 1990s, while the US was initially not so favourable to us joining.

For people in our region, Russian expansionism is the existential threat. And it is Russia that is expanding towards and across our region – by invading Ukraine.

If you look honestly at the history of NATO-Russia relations regarding Europe, you will see it was Russia who regularly step forward first with the will to escalate.

Politically, you can speak of appeasement regarding Western European policy towards Russia in recent decades. Militarily, regarding troop and weapon deployments, you cannot speak of provocation.

On the other hand, Razem has actively opposed any Polish participation in NATO's contemptuous, hardly legal, interventions, such as in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, etc. Any arbitrary action that is motivated by primitive extractionism

or forced upon the alliance members via political pressure from the US is for us the true meaning of “NATO expansionism”. And we oppose it.

We are also clear that such actions have only emboldened Russia, and provided it with precedents to carry out its own brazen imperialist actions.

Razem is aware that there are several imperialisms at play in our part of Europe and that we cannot afford to take sides supporting one imperialism over another.

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