

Response to the majority position on the current crisis in Ukraine

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On the majority position

1. We accept, will publicly defend and will not obstruct – but do not agree with – the organization’s approach as outlined in the 13 May contribution by HaPe [Breitman], on behalf of the majority. In particular, we strongly disagree with the majority’s failure to acknowledge the imperialist status of Russia and the subordination of the current crisis to inter-imperialist rivalries over spheres of influence.
2. We recognize that the principle of dual defeatism in relation to inter-imperialist disputes over spheres of influence has no weight in this issue for the majority, and that therefore the majority considers that support for the separation of some territories currently part of Ukraine might contribute to a solution to the Ukrainian crisis (as opposed to playing into the hands of one of the imperialist contenders).
3. The refusal of the majority to seriously acknowledge the geopolitical dimension to the crisis in Ukraine is rather odd given the obvious tensions between the West and Russia – tensions that have played a key role over the past several months – and the recognition that Russia is being “encircled” (i.e., its spheres of influence diminished) by U.S.-led Western imperialism.
4. Even if one were to set aside the issue of imperialism and take the crisis as “in essence a national conflict” within Ukraine, the majority’s statement would not offer a coherent perspective because it fails to apply a Leninist framework to the national question in Ukraine:
 - a) The declaration that “communists should support the right of eastern Ukrainians to democratically decide about their future within or outside the Ukraine” fails to make the case that “eastern Ukrainians” are a nation (or to explain which sub-groups in eastern Ukraine are part of that nation) *or* to define the units of decision-making, i.e., the specific oblasts or parts of oblasts. In practice, only Donetsk Oblast, Luhansk Oblast and possibly Kharkiv Oblast – each immediately contiguous with the Russian Federation – would have any real chance of being able to separate from Ukraine. According to the last census (2001), approximately 75% and 70% of the populations of Donetsk and Luhansk respectively are native Russian-speakers, including many self-identified ethnic Ukrainians (who constitute nearly 60% of the population in these oblasts). In Kharkiv, around 45% of the population are native Russian-speakers, while only 25% self-identified as ethnically Russian in the last census. In Odessa Oblast, which is not contiguous with the Russian Federation, only 20% of the population self-identified as ethnic Russian while around 40% considered that Russian was their native language.
 - b) Attempting to address conflict between an oppressor nation and the nation(s) it oppresses in a situation of “interpenetrated peoples” (or a combination of interpenetration in some areas and varying degrees of mixing in others) by redrawing the boundaries of national states is in general and in this particular case more likely to exacerbate than to reduce divisions in the working class. Attempting to achieve separation for a territory that is dominated numerically by the oppressed nation, but mixed with the nation that in the wider state context is numerically dominant and the oppressor, will not remove the national question from the agenda. It is more likely to remove the “class question” from the agenda.
5. The majority’s claim that “Communists supported the however imperfect referendum for Crimea to secede” does not specify whether they support *holding* the referendum or they advocate a vote to secede *in* that referendum, or merely that they support the *implementation* of the purported outcome of 97% in favor of separation. It is, furthermore, unclear if the majority views the Donetsk and Luhansk referendums in the same light as they do the Crimea referendum, despite what appears to be a higher degree of national interpenetration. The majority asserts that “Currently the majority of Eastern Ukrainians would still prefer to remain part of Ukraine rather than becoming Russians,” yet the leaders of the “People’s Republic of Donetsk” who claimed about 90% support in the referendum asked to join Russia two hours after the results were announced.
6. The majority’s call for self-defense guards to be constructed on a revolutionary program is ultimatumist. Such defense guards in the real situation would have the character of united fronts in which revolutionary

socialists (inevitably a tiny minority in the beginning) would seek opportunities to advance the Marxist program.

7. The majority statement fails to give political guidance to IBT sections confronted with practical questions such as the attitude we should have toward the various demonstrations that are being called (in solidarity with “anti-fascists” against fascists; in support of the “rebellion” in eastern Ukraine; equating both sides in the conflict; etc.). The majority statement seems to tilt in favor of supporting the anti-Kiev demonstrations in Ukraine insofar as these may be seen as defending the right of “eastern Ukrainians” to self-determination, or insofar as they are seen merely as comprised of the victims of Right Sector fascist terror (though the majority also claims that this is not the main axis of the conflict). Which demonstrations should we attend? With what slogans?

The minority position

1. The emerging Ukrainian civil war is a product of the intersection of (a) domestic Ukrainian economic, social, national and political problems with (b) an inter-imperialist struggle for influence over Ukraine, which triggered the conflict in the first place. It appears that neither the Western imperialists nor the Russian imperialists currently wish to see Ukraine break apart (though Moscow is keeping Crimea). Nor do they wish to see the country fall into anarchy, which would not be helpful to Germany or Russia in particular, as Ukraine serves as a strategic transit route for energy resources between these two powers. It also appears that neither side of the inter-imperialist dispute fully controls the contending factions within Ukraine that seek their support to varying degrees. From a revolutionary perspective, however, the dispute between the West and Russia is *politically paramount* in the Ukrainian crisis, as the question of imperialism supersedes any bourgeois-democratic question that may be posed. We begin from a position of *dual defeatism* in the conflict between Washington/Berlin/Brussels (with their own tensions) and Moscow.
2. A position of dual defeatism in relation to the imperialist powers with competing interests in Ukraine does not entail a phony even-handedness in empirical descriptions of foreign meddling in Ukrainian affairs. While both Russian and Western military/intelligence agents are almost certainly on the ground in Ukraine (and there is some compelling evidence pointing to the presence of CIA operatives in particular), it would seem that Russia has less influence over its Ukrainian supporters than the U.S. and Germany have over their own supporters/bloc partners. The hypocrisy of the Western “democracies” energetically backing the putschist regime in Kiev and its neo-Nazi storm troopers terrorizing ethnic minorities/opponents is particularly disgusting. Revolutionaries demand the immediate expulsion of all imperialist military forces/intelligence operatives from Ukraine – a call that, while including those from Russia, in practice mainly refers to those from the Western imperialist countries.
3. The position of dual defeatism extends to the indigenous Ukrainian proxies, or would-be proxies, of the rival imperialist powers. The leading contending factions in the emerging Ukrainian civil war (centered in the eastern oblasts but manifest in other parts of the country as well) would be equally unsupportable even in the absence of imperialist sponsorship. The rightwing Ukrainian nationalist regime in Kiev came to power with the open support of fascist elements of the Maidan movement (including Svoboda, which is part of the government), and has integrated neo-Nazi Right Sector militants into the state apparatus via the formation of the National Guard. Predictably, opposition forces are more politically heterogeneous, ranging from left-leaning forces (some of which do not identify with Moscow) to rightwing Russian nationalists to outright fascists. Insofar as opposition forces have managed to seize control of parts of Eastern Ukraine, it appears that rightwing pro-Moscow Russian nationalists predominate (with the leftwing and fascists elements marginalized for the time being).
4. We must be careful not to lump together all those forces that find themselves in opposition to the Kiev regime and/or under attack from its armed forces. In many cases they will be ordinary citizens with no political affiliation, and in some cases they will be members of the workers’ movement who at least nominally oppose nationalism of all varieties. Each case must be judged on its own merits, and legitimate opposition to the Kiev regime (or simple self-defense against state and/or fascist violence) must be distinguished from the opposition of ethnic Russian exploiters/would-be exploiters.
5. While the conflict between the Kiev-based regime and opposition forces is complex (and overlain with political and ideological differences), it is assuming the form of a nascent *civil war* between the two basic nations of Ukraine: Ukrainians and Russians. From a Leninist perspective, those two nations have the right

to self-determination, and either nation has the right to defend itself against national oppression, which the Kiev-based Ukrainian chauvinist regime appears to be trying to impose on Russians in Ukraine. Revolutionaries do not support the territorial integrity of Ukraine and are, in theory, open to various possible configurations of state borders.

6. At the same time, revolutionaries do not support the separation of Donetsk, Luhansk or other Ukrainian territories inasmuch as:
 - a) the question of Ukraine's borders in the present situation is principally a question of which rival imperialist will control as much as possible of this sphere of influence; and
 - b) the populations in Southeastern Ukraine are mixed in complex ways, and separation would, in the present circumstances, almost certainly entail a subordination of a national minority (and even forced "population transfers" between newly-independent republics and what remains of Ukraine). In some areas of Southeastern Ukraine, ethnic Russians or Ukrainians are dominant (though the Russian language may be spoken by a majority in either case), while in others the two nations are more clearly interpenetrated. The situation may vary within oblasts. Given the particular fluidity of Ukrainian and Russian identity in Ukraine, and the complex linguistic considerations, national affiliations in this transitional area would appear to be in flux.
7. Revolutionaries oppose all forms of national oppression, in particular the Ukrainian chauvinist attacks on the rights of Russophones/ethnic Russians. We advocate equal rights for all language groups, and in particular both Russian and Ukrainian, but also including, for instance, the Tatar language in Crimea.
8. While we take no side in conflicts between competing factions in the emerging civil war, we condemn nationalist atrocities perpetrated by either side, e.g., the killing of dozens of anti-regime protestors by Right Sector Nazis in Odessa. We recognize the right of every community to defend itself against violence from the state or fascists or pogromists. We advocate multi-communal workers' self-defense guards to defend all communities and workers' organizations.
9. We advance the perspective of working-class unity against the capitalist-oligarch system and for socialist revolution and the formation of the Socialist United States of Europe and a Eurasian Socialist Federation – the only framework in which the national antagonisms in Ukraine (and many other former Soviet states) can be equitably addressed. Key to this revolutionary socialist perspective is proletarian-internationalist opposition to all imperialist powers (German, Russian, U.S., British, etc.) – the main enemy is at home!