

A discussion with a Russian socialist opponent of the war in Ukraine

David North
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A Russian comrade, who firmly opposes the invasion of Ukraine, describes the mood within Russia as deeply conflicted. There is widespread sentiment that nothing positive can come out of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

But many people believe that NATO forced Putin into a corner, with the aim of provoking a war that will create conditions for regime change in Moscow and the break up of Russia.

The Kremlin is trying to appeal to the population by arousing nationalist and chauvinist sentiments, but the success of these efforts is limited. Only to the extent that it is seen as a defensive action is the war supported.

But even among supporters there is little enthusiasm. The more common sentiment is one of depression. The Kremlin, acting on behalf of a corrupt oligarchy, is incapable of making a popular appeal to the Russian public, and certainly not to the Ukrainian people.

People realize that Putin has made disastrous miscalculations. Among the broad mass of the working people, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism is viewed as a disaster which has led to the present crisis.

But they fear that a NATO victory will have terrible consequences—possibly the fragmentation of Russia and the theft of its raw materials by NATO powers. Most Russians want to see the war ended, but they do not know how this can be achieved without destroying the country.

I asked: “What would be the impact upon Russian workers and leftwing intellectuals of a genuine anti-war movement in the ‘West,’ which made clear its opposition to US/NATO imperialism, Ukrainian fascists and Putin’s corrupt and chauvinistic regime?”

The Russian Trotskyist replied: “Of course, Putin’s

government would do everything in its power to prevent the Russian workers, intellectuals and student youth from learning of this development. Putin hates socialism and views its adherents as his most dangerous enemies.

“But if a genuine anti-war movement developed in the United States and Europe, it would have a powerful effect on social consciousness in Russia. It is impossible to see a way out of this crisis, stop the violence and avoid disaster without a global perspective.

“News of working people in the United States and Germany opposing NATO’s threats against Russia would inspire hope among Russian people and encourage them to oppose the Kremlin and demand an immediate end to the war.

“Putin draws his strength from pessimism. He is helped by hate-filled denunciations of Russia, which lead people in this country to believe they are isolated in a hostile world dominated by an all-powerful United States.

“But that pessimism would be dispelled by the emergence of an international anti-war movement. Though it is suppressed within the existing post-Soviet environment, there remains among the people a deep feeling that the October Revolution was a great event.

“Putin attacked Lenin when he launched the war. This is not popular among masses of people, who still view Lenin as a great historical figure who fought for the working class and human equality.

“Of course, there remains confusion about the Revolution. But it has not been entirely forgotten that the 1917 Revolution arose out of opposition to Russia’s disastrous involvement in World War I.

“So, yes, the emergence of an anti-war movement in the US and Europe would dramatically change the

situation in Russia.”



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