

United Steelworkers solicits aid for fascist-linked “union” in Ukraine

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The United Steelworkers recently issued an appeal for donations for “Fellow Steel Workers fighting in Ukraine.” The appeal for money, which is being sent to the Trade Union of the Metalworkers and Miners of Ukraine (PMGU), part of the Federation of Trade Unions in Ukraine (KVPU), has nothing to do with humanitarian assistance, let alone genuine working class solidarity. Instead, it is part of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy’s support for US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

The request for support issued by PMGU includes war materiel, such as helmets, thermal imagers, body armor and military boots in addition to medical supplies. The letter also called for the establishment of a “No Fly Zone,” a huge expansion of the war in Ukraine that would mean a direct clash between the US-NATO and Russia with potentially incalculable consequences.

The USW claims the money will be used to help workers at ArcelorMittal’s Kryvyi Rih facility. But the money will not be used to aid workers and their families devastated by the war but to help arm Ukraine’s military forces in anticipation of a Russian military advance on Kryvyi Rih, the largest city in Central Ukraine.

The USW and the so-called global union IndustriALL are essentially involved in a gun-running operation to further the foreign policy aims of the Biden administration and the NATO powers. The US and its allies are not seeking a peaceful end to the war but its escalation into a full-scale war against nuclear-armed Russia. The aim of these insane war plans is to install a pro-US puppet in Moscow and to seize the vast energy and mineral assets of Russia.

Who are the recipients of USW aid to Ukraine? They are right-wing labor syndicates, deeply tied in with US foreign policy machinations. The KVPU is a notorious US State Department/CIA labor front, with direct ties to the Ukrainian far right, including the fascist Azov Battalion.

The KVPU has long been a conduit for money funneled

from the US State Department through the AFL-CIO’s American Center for International Labor Solidarity (also known as Solidarity Center). The Solidarity Center is almost entirely funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, a CIA front organization, along with the State Department and USAID.

Such “unions” have long been used by the US government to disrupt and divert genuine struggles by workers in defense of decent living and working conditions and democratic rights. They have helped to install and maintain right-wing and authoritarian governments aligned with the foreign policy of the US.

The American Institute for Free Labor Development, a predecessor of the Solidarity Center, participated in CIA-backed coups in a number of countries, including Guatemala (1954), British Guiana (1963), Brazil (1964), the Dominican Republic (1965) and Chile (1973).

The PMGU and KVPU are part of these sordid operations.

The leader of the KVPU, Mikhail Volynets, is a longtime US asset. In 2004, Volynets was awarded the AFL-CIO George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award in part for his work related to the US government-backed “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine. The operation was one of the “color” revolutions sponsored by the US aimed at ousting pro-Russian administrations in Eastern Europe as part of a drive to isolate and encircle Moscow.

In 2014, Volynets played a role in another regime change operation in Ukraine, assisting the fascist-backed coup that overthrew the pro-Russian government of President Viktor Yanukovich and installed a pro-Western regime. Volynets and the KVPU helped stage a fraudulent “general strike” called in February 2014 as part of the US regime change operation.

An account of Volynets’ role in the “strike” written by Oleg Vernyk, chairman of the All-Ukrainian independent trade union Zakhyst Pratsi (Labor Defence), appeared in

the Ukrainian news magazine *korrespondent.net*.

While the Ukrainian media hailed the strike as a “success,” it was largely ignored in Eastern Ukraine. In a blog post Vernyk wrote, “Ordered by the directors of the enterprises, workers were forced to abandon their lunches and gather for one hour in front of the main entrances to their factories, to express their hearty support of the opposition leaders. A clip about this ‘lunch strike’ in a linen factory in Rivne was on constant rotation on TV Channel 5, which belongs to the oligarch Petro Poroshenko. Its participants later openly admitted that their ‘strike’ was ordered by the factory’s director. And this was the scenario for all of the enterprises that were announced as having joined the ‘All-Ukrainian Strike.’”

In another sham operation conducted by the KPvU, Vernyk reported that “the leaders of the political opposition demanded that Mikhail Volynets bring the miners to Kiev—no miners arrived. Instead, Volynets had the office workers of his KVPU put on the miners’ helmets and simulate ‘miners from Donetsk and Luhansk’ at Maidan.”

Vernyk continued, “[T]he KVPU has long ago lost all human and organizational resources and is incapable of organizing any ‘strike’ by its own strength. For over 20 years, the American labor and trade union, the AFL-CIO, has provided financial and organizational support to the KVPU.”

In “Underground waterlines: Explaining political quiescence of Ukrainian labor unions,” Denys Gorbach wrote, “In 2016, the KVPU officially built an alliance with the neo-Nazi regiment Azov, co-opting one of its fighters as the deputy head of the federation (Chernomorskaya Teleradiokompaniya).”

The individual chosen by Volynets was Ihor Kniazhansky, aka “Dushman” from the Azov Regiment, a fascist outfit that has been incorporated as an official part of the Ukrainian military. Azov has become a rallying point for neo-fascists all over the world, who are flocking to Ukraine to get real life military experience.

In *Covert Action Magazine*, a piece titled “The AFL-CIO’s Nazi Friendly Union in Ukraine,” written by Giorgio Manfredi, noted, “Volynets chose Dushman, which allegedly means ‘suffocater’ in Ukrainian, because his aggressive style helped the union gain concessions from the minister during the talks. Before joining Azov, Dushman fought in the Afghanistan war and is currently the head of the Vinnytsia branch of the National Corps, a fascist political party.”

Manfredi also reported, “In 2019, members of the U.S.

Congress considered declaring the Azov Battalion a terrorist organization. In response Volynets and several other members of parliament signed a letter defending and praising the Azov Battalion. The letter also stressed the idea that Ukraine should join NATO in the future.”

As for the Trade Union of Metalworkers and miners at the ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih steel mill, Maksym Kazakov, a Ukrainian left-wing activist, writing in *Open Democracy* reported, “There are 10 unions operating at the plant, and the largest of them is the Union of Metalworkers and Miners of Ukraine (PMGU), which is part of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU). PMGU can be considered a so-called ‘yellow’ trade union—an official institution with its roots in the Soviet era, and which mostly avoids conflicts with owners and concentrates on distributing bonuses, sanatorium trips and gifts on public holidays to its members.”

Workers beware. The old saying, “Tell me what company you keep, and I will tell you what you are,” holds true here. The United Steelworkers is not interested in supporting Ukrainian workers but in advancing the pro-war agenda of the Biden administration in alliance with far-right and fascist forces inside Ukraine.

At the same time, the support by the USW for the Biden administration’s war drive extends to the United States, where the USW intervened to block a threatened strike by 30,000 oil refinery workers in February and rammed through a miserable contract that ensures that workers’ wages will be eaten up by inflation, now running at more than 8 percent annually. Unable to block a strike by workers at the Chevron refinery in Richmond, California, the USW has kept the workers isolated to try to wear them down.

The deal scuttling a national oil workers walkout was announced a day following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and three days after a closed-door virtual meeting between the USW President Tom Conway and President Biden, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks. The meeting was no doubt used by the White House to give the USW president his marching orders to prevent any disruption to US energy supplies as Biden ramped up for war against Russia.



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