

Speaker at DSA panel: “War creates the possibility for a push of socialist ideas”

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At a recent panel event hosted by the Democratic Socialists of America’s (DSA) chapter for the state of Maine, Vladyslav Starodubstev, a leader of the Ukrainian pseudo-left Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement), put forward the chilling perspective that “the war creates the possibility for a push of socialist ideas in Ukraine.” The panelists and DSA moderators stated their agreement with the speaker and demanded the US government deploy more tanks, missiles, and howitzers to wage war against Russia, regardless of the risk of nuclear holocaust.

This was the outcome of an event cynically titled “Ukrainian, Russian and Polish socialists speak out for peace,” moderated by DSA member and former International Socialist Organization (ISO) leader Todd Chretien.

It is a strange kind of “peace” meeting that calls for deploying American weapons, praises NATO and the Pentagon, explicitly opposes any negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine and urges “solidarity” with a government dominated by neo-Nazis.

Starodubstev got right to the point:

“The Ukrainian people have a right to fight,” he said, “Left-wing people can support Ukrainian people to fight to be Ukrainians. To support this fight, people need to voice their opinion for sending weapons to Ukraine and for limiting the military possibilities of the Russian regime, by pushing also for sanctions. This is my main point. Diplomatic solutions won’t work. To have a diplomatic discussion, to negotiate something, one needs to have power.”

Beyond Starodubstev, the event also featured Zofia Malisz, a representative of the Polish pseudo-left party Razem. Malisz echoed Starodubstev’s call for expanding the war.

“We should deliver weapons to Ukraine,” she said. “You strangely find yourself in a situation where you may actually agree in practice with the US State Department. You suddenly find yourself in alliance with whatever NATO is doing.”

In reality, there is nothing “strange” about this. The DSA and its international associates represent a section of the upper-middle class whose material interests correspond with Wall Street’s drive for world domination. They “agree in practice” with American imperialism because they share the same social interests. For its entire history, the DSA has formed a part of the State Department and imperialist apparatus. DSA founder Michael Harrington said, after all, that the organization would play “a pro-American, Cold War, State Department kind of role.”

Chretien, speaking after Starodubstev and Malisz’s appeal for weapons shipments, declared, “We have the same principles and the same overriding goals. I think the comrades in the Ukraine are absolutely right to ask for whatever aid they need and that socialists should feel completely confident about providing whatever aid we can. Unfortunately, or fortunately, the DSA is not in charge of the American State Department or Pentagon so we have no control over what our government sends.”

In the aftermath of the DSA’s meeting, what Chretien tellingly referred to as “our government” agreed to send Ukraine \$40 billion in military aid. Every single DSA member of Congress, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jamaal Bowman, Cori Bush and Rashida Tlaib, voted to support the aid package. Ilhan Omar and Bernie Sanders, who are not technically DSA members, also voted for the bill.

To justify their appeal for weapons, the speakers at the DSA event downplayed the role played by neo-Nazis in the Ukrainian military and denounced all left-wing criticism of NATO and US imperialism as “justifying genocide.”

Starodubstev attacked those who criticize NATO’s eastward expansion as “mirroring Russian propaganda.”

“When people try to bring up NATO, they are just justifying Russian aggression against the Ukrainian people, justifying genocide against the Ukrainian people,” he said. “We must strongly fight against all misunderstandings. I hope this discussion will help bring this understanding into DSA.”

Malisz said that “Western leftists” who criticize NATO are engaged in “US-centric thinking.” She attacked not only opponents of NATO, but also all who call for a negotiated end to the war. “Be wary of people who say that the west should talk to Russia and negotiate Ukraine’s neutrality. Talking like that over the heads of countries that are directly affected is worthy of the most arrogant attitudes the west has had anywhere.” She said that it is “neo-colonial” and “orientalist” to support a negotiated peace.

Malisz called NATO expansion a “myth,” saying, “NATO expansion is one of the most persistent myths on the left, particularly the western left. Left intellectuals say ‘yes we condemn Putin’s regime but,’ and they treat that as a preface for a long litany of criticisms against NATO that always contain this NATO expansion myth.” In fact, NATO’s constant eastward expansion is a violation of repeated assurances made by the imperialist powers to the Russian oligarchs who usurped power after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The panelists responded to an audience member who spoke and expressed concern over the fact that weapons sent to Ukraine are ending up in the hands of fascists like the Azov Battalion.

Starodubstev’s response was to reassure the audience that “the Ukrainian Army is political and has a very centralized structure so the weapons are centrally distributed. ... The possibility of [the far-right] using these weapons for pushing their political goal is very low,” Starodubstev said. He sought to comfort the questioner by saying, “I don’t think the far-right will use planes and Javelin missiles to fire at minorities.”

Starodubstev presented the NATO-armed Ukrainian Army as a force for socialism. “Socialists are fighting in the army,” he said, and if weapons are sent, “more people will see” the bravery of socialist soldiers. He did not address the fact that entire battalions of the Ukrainian armed forces are explicitly neo-Nazis, or that most of the political leadership of the country are admirers of Stepan Bandera, the Nazi collaborator who participated in the Holocaust. The Ukrainian army, he insisted, is a progressive popular force that is waging an “anti-colonial war.”

Malisz stressed that socialists should not be embarrassed about supporting the positions of their imperialist governments. “This is uncomfortable,” she acknowledged, “and it happens to be where I find myself, agreeing with liberal German politicians or the general Christian democratic conservatives in Europe.”

She then addressed the “historic origins” of her present alignment with German imperialism. Referencing the parties of the German bourgeoisie, she said, “they also fought against Soviet aggression, for only partly overlapping

motives. So you have to understand the differences in the motives, but not have a knee-jerk reaction to reject the solution, like sending Ukraine weapons.”

Though she was not asked to clarify her remarks, Malisz’s reference to Germany’s fight against “Soviet aggression” is highly significant, considering the German bourgeoisie under Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, killed 30 million Soviet soldiers and civilians and carried out the systematic extermination of the Jewish population of Europe.

Malisz concluded her remarks with a declaration that sums up the attitude of the tendencies involved: “Some on the left say the left has a duty to offer an alternative to the mainstream view. I disagree.” She said that those who believe in “abstract peace or dreams of a revolution” are “completely out of touch.”

It was a fittingly pathetic end to this gathering of imperialist warmongers. To Malisz’s last point, genuine socialist opponents of war respond with the words of Vladimir Lenin, who wrote:

A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, cannot fail to see that its military reverses facilitate its overthrow. Only a bourgeois who believes that a war started by the governments must necessarily end as a war between governments and wants it to end as such, can regard as “ridiculous” and “absurd” the idea that the Socialists of *all* the belligerent countries should wish for the defeat of *all* “their” governments and express this wish.

That is the perspective of genuine socialists to the expanding US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. There is nothing surprising about the DSA organizing an event declaring that imperialist war “creates the possibility for a push of socialist ideas.” This is the role the DSA has played for a half-century. It is not a socialist organization, it is a part of the Democratic Party and the American imperialist war machine.



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