

# The Democratic Socialists of America and the invention of the pro-imperialist “Ukrainian resistance”

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On June 3, *Tempest* published an article entitled “Solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance!” by Ashley Smith, a prominent member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and former leader of the now-defunct International Socialist Organization (ISO).

The article calls for arming Ukraine with heavy NATO weapons and is a tirade against all who question the propaganda of US imperialism. It justifies US escalation by claiming the Ukrainian people are engaged in a democratic struggle for self-determination against Russian “imperialism.”

Smith’s article is an attempt to preempt opposition within the milieu of the Democratic Socialists of America to the prolonged US/NATO-led war, which has provoked widespread shortages of basic necessities all over the world and risks plunging the globe into a nuclear nightmare. As Smith says in a brief preface, the article aims to “review the ongoing Left debates about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the continuing need to defend Ukrainian resistance as the starting point for rebuilding international solidarity from below.”

In his article, Smith declares that “the international Left now more than ever must organize solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance” and “defend its right to secure arms.” Smith argues that the Ukrainian military “has waged a national popular struggle for self-determination,” a “fundamentally democratic aim and one that deserves the full support of the international left.”

There can be no talk of NATO expansion, which Smith claims is merely Putin’s “alibi,” because the states of Eastern Europe only joined NATO “out of longtime fear of their imperial overlord, Russia.” The crux of Smith’s argument is that the war is one of popular working class “resistance” to Russia. In this vein, Smith attacks “Faux anti-imperialists” who oppose arming the so-called Ukrainian resistance and thereby “betray Ukraine.”

These are not serious theoretical arguments, they are absurdities. Smith makes no attempt to explain how Ukraine’s attempt to join NATO, a military network run by the world’s largest imperialist powers, constitutes a step toward “self-determination,” nor can he explain why pro-Russian separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk cannot assert the same “right” to leave Ukraine. He praises the Ukrainian “left” for fighting “the government’s oligarchic capitalism,” but he cannot explain how it is that this same government is leading a struggle against imperialism. The subject of the Ukrainian regime’s glorification of Stepan Bandera—the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which participated in the mass extermination of Jews during World War II—is all but ignored.

Smith’s targets are not those who openly defend Russia, but rather parties and individuals that “might criticize Russia” but “blame the US and NATO for the conflict” and thereby “justify Russia’s war.” “Even worse,” Smith writes, they “back actions” like strikes by workers to

“block arms shipments to Ukraine.” He attacks those who “condemn Russia’s invasion” but “also oppose Ukraine’s military resistance as well as US and NATO arms shipments in support of it.”

Smith often uses this type of provocative language to justify US intervention. In 2016, for example, he advocated US imperialist support for the so-called “democratic opposition” in Syria by writing: “The Syrian Revolution has tested the left internationally by posing a blunt question: Which side are you on? Do you support the popular struggle against dictatorship and for democracy? Or are you with Bashar al-Assad’s brutal regime, his imperial backer Russia, his regional ally Iran and Iran’s proxies like Hezbollah from Lebanon?”

In his article on the Ukrainian “resistance,” Smith denounces “pacifists” who “oppose Ukraine’s right to secure arms and the arms shipments themselves, instead calling for the US to broker a ceasefire, engage in diplomacy, and secure a negotiated settlement.” This, Smith says, is an attack on “Ukraine’s right to self-determination.” Since Ukraine’s “government and its people have made clear that they remain committed to resisting Russian occupation,” the “left” must demand the bloody war be dragged out until all Ukrainian territory is taken from Russian control.

To the extent that Smith criticizes American and European imperialism at all, it is to claim they are insufficiently bellicose against Russia. Smith worries that “a growing chorus in the elite, most notably in western Europe, is actually calling for a ceasefire... which would betray Ukraine’s struggle.” The proponents of such pacifism include “multinational capital” and “the corporate media and political class in the US and Europe.”

Calling the Biden administration “hypersensitive to such pressure from its European allies,” Smith warns “there is a real danger that Western imperialism could force Ukraine into a rotten deal that ratifies the Russian partition of the country.” In other words, Smith’s position is to the right of finance capital and the Biden administration. On this basis he proposes: “Now more than ever we should build solidarity with Ukraine’s resistance and defend its right to secure arms including from the US and NATO to free itself from Russian occupation.”

## The Shachtmanite essence of Ashley Smith’s pro-imperialist politics

It is politically revealing that Smith writes of the need “to correct the distortions made by some sections of the Left about the nature of this war: it is one of imperialist aggression by Russia to re-impose its rule over its oldest former colony, Ukraine.”

The claim that Ukraine is a “colony” of Russian “imperialism” is an

intentional historical sleight of hand. It bypasses the Russian Revolution of 1917, which overthrew the Tsarist regime and ended the bloody struggle of German and Russian imperialism for control over Ukraine and the rest of Eastern Europe in the First World War. The Bolsheviks overturned the imperial-colonial relationship and, in the pre-Stalin period, sought to counteract the influence of Great Russian chauvinism and to facilitate the political unification of the workers of Ukraine and Russia.

But Smith has no concern for making an appraisal of the actual social forces involved in this conflict. His reference to Ukraine as Russia's "oldest former colony" is an attempt to equate the brutal tsarist colonial subjugation of Ukraine with the Soviet Union's policy toward the country, and to thereby present the Soviet Union as an imperialist power which did not represent a progressive development from the tsarist regime that preceded it.

In a separate article, Smith attacked critics of US imperialism's war aims against Russia for practicing what he called "abstract morality." To those who believe that the historic record of American imperialism's wars give reason to doubt its humanitarian pretenses, Smith wrote: "In place of abstract morality, which can lead to a frankly immoral position of neutrality in the struggle between oppressors and oppressed, we should approach the question of violence and war politically and as a tactical question. We should oppose wars that enforce domination, oppression, and exploitation, and support wars that free people from those structures."

To Marxists, the struggle against imperialism and imperialist violence and oppression is not a "tactical question," it is a principled strategic question upon which the fate of the revolution depends. Whether a state is "imperialist" or "oppressed" is not an "abstract moral" label, it is a historical-sociological determination with concrete political consequences. Here, Smith references "abstract morality" only as a means to justify the death and destruction wrought by US imperialism and to hide behind the fig leaf of the so-called Ukrainian "resistance" to the Russian "empire," and he cannot claim the "moral" high ground when his own position corresponds with that of a government dripping with blood from 30 years of permanent war in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Smith's presentation of Ukraine as a victim of longstanding Russian "imperialism" echoes the argument of 20th century anti-communists who argued that the Soviet Union was an "imperialist" state and that non-Russian republics of the USSR were "captive states" in the imperial Soviet "empire." The term "captive states" was promoted by the National Captive Nations Committee, a far-right group whose chairman, Yaroslav Stetsko, was a Nazi collaborator who led the OUN after Bandera's death. The group changed its name to the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in 1993.

This is not an accidental correspondence of views. Smith belongs to the tradition of Shachtmanism, which is rooted in pro-imperialist anti-communism.

### **The Shachtmanite origins of the DSA**

The DSA and its predecessor organization (the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee—DSOC) emerged out of a political tendency led by Max Shachtman, who had joined the communist movement in 1923 and co-founded the American section of the Trotskyist Left Opposition with James P. Cannon when Trotskyists were expelled by the Stalinists in 1928.

Shachtman split from the Trotskyist movement in the United States at the onset of the Second World War in 1939-40 and moved far from the socialist traditions he had once defended. He argued that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a new ruling "class" and put forward the position that

"socialists" must support "democratic" American imperialism in the Cold War against "authoritarian" Russia.

On this basis, Shachtman supported the Korean War, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the Vietnam War, and became an adviser to the AFL-CIO. His political progeny, including figures like Tom Kahn, became deeply embedded in the AFL-CIO's activity on behalf of American imperialism through the American Institute for Free Labor Development. This organization, which was the predecessor to today's Solidarity Center, was a critical mechanism through which US imperialism has manipulated elections, organized coups and suppressed the class struggle on a world scale for decades.

Another of Shachtman's apprentices, DSOC founder Michael Harrington, brought the anti-communist essence of Shachtman's politics into the movement against the war in Vietnam and then into the foundation of DSOC and the DSA. Historian Todd Gitlin said, "Anti-Communism was Harrington's emotional touchstone," which he had acquired "with the brilliant and bitter Max Shachtman." Harrington's principle was that "the left" must, as he put it, play "a pro-American, Cold War, State Department kind of role."

### **The DSA as a catchment area for social opposition**

For decades, the DSA has functioned as a faction within the Democratic Party. After years of isolation, the DSA benefited from its identification with Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign to acquire tens of thousands of paper members in a relatively short period of time. Sanders, with the support of the DSA, almost won the Democratic Party's nomination against Hillary Clinton that year, to the shock of the entire political establishment, including Sanders himself.

In 2018, DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won a primary election against top House Democrat Joe Crowley, and the DSA witnessed another influx of new members, largely young people who supported the organization because they believed it to be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist.

But the DSA is not a vehicle for opposing capitalism and war, it is a catchment area for the political establishment, where social opposition is to be trapped and neutralized within the Democratic Party. That is the role it has played for decades, in which it has functioned as a loyal faction of the Democratic Party.

In particular, the historical role of the DSA has been to disorient anti-war sentiment, color American imperialism's foreign policy objectives as "left-wing" or "democratic," and facilitate the global machinations of the US war machine.

But the fight for socialism is incompatible with support for US imperialism, and the DSA is not a socialist organization. Like the viciously pro-war Green parties in Europe, its social base is a section of the affluent upper-middle class which forms a key social constituency for imperialist war against Russia. The political actions of the DSA's elected officials reflect its class character. In mid-May the DSA's entire congressional slate (including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, Jamaal Bowman, Ilhan Omar and Bernie Sanders) voted for the Biden administration's \$40 billion Ukraine military aid bill.

### **The ISO dissolves itself, enters the DSA**

In the spring of 2019, the International Socialist Organization (which

also belongs to the Shachtmanite tradition but remained separate from the DSA for decades) dissolved itself almost overnight. The pretense for the dissolution was an allegation of sexual assault by one member against another from six years earlier, but the real reason was the leadership's recognition that they could best fulfill their political aims within the broader radicalized milieu of the DSA, with whom they shared common roots. After the organization's leaders successfully disentangled the highly profitable book publishing company Haymarket Books from the organization, the ISO voted to dissolve itself and the bulk of its members promptly joined the DSA.

While in the ISO, Smith had been one of the organization's chief writers on foreign policy, consistently promoting various US-backed color movements, including in Syria, where Smith repeatedly presented the CIA-funded "democratic forces" as a popular resistance and denounced opponents of US intervention.

When Smith and other ISO leaders joined the DSA, their primary responsibility was to ensure that the anti-imperialist aspirations of the newly radicalized membership did not develop as a challenge to the pro-imperialist political essence of the DSA, which over its entire existence has functioned as a faction within the imperialist Democratic Party.

To this end, the ex-ISO members founded the Tempest Collective in 2020. Tempest Collective publishes *Tempest* magazine, the DSA-affiliated publication in which Smith's June 3 article on Ukraine appeared. Over 35 contributors to *Tempest* (the overwhelming majority of its total writers) are former members of the ISO and/or former contributors to its publications, *Socialist Worker* and the *International Socialist Review*.

Smith is also the publication manager for *Spectre*, a journal focusing on foreign policy and identity politics, whose editorial board includes a number of former ISO leaders, including Charles Post, David McNally, Tithi Bhattacharya and Shireen Akram-Boshar.

### The invention of a Ukrainian "resistance"

The title of Smith's article—"Solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance!"—announces a new stage in the pro-war propaganda campaign. It is the hallmark of Shachtmanism to present a "left" face on American imperialism's wars. In this tradition, Smith and other proponents of war are inventing a "Ukrainian resistance" to present the war as an "anti-colonial" struggle by the Ukrainian people.

The model of the so-called resistance is an organization that was totally unknown before the outbreak of the war: Sotsialnyi Rukh.

Sotsialnyi Rukh has played a key role in creating an international network for war against Russia. It has hosted international gatherings advocating war, including one in Lvov on May 5-6 that was attended by representatives of the Polish party Razem, the French New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and the Argentinian Morenoite Left Front-Workers Unity, as well as delegations from British trade unions. According to a statement posted by Sotsialnyi Rukh after the May gathering, "all delegates called for armed support of Ukraine and strict sanctions. Some of them directly influence the making of these decisions" by their own governments.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Sotsialnyi Rukh's leaders have given a flood of interviews to international "left" publications to promote war and advocate the delivery of NATO weapons to Ukraine. During media appearances, Sotsialnyi Rukh leaders stick to the same script, consistently parroting US imperialism's claim that the war is a national liberation struggle and that "the left" must support weapons shipments. A common feature of these interviews is vicious denunciations of "Western leftists" who oppose US/NATO escalation and who claim the war is anything but a war for national liberation.

Some examples include the following:

On February 25, the day after Russia invaded Ukraine, Sotsialnyi Rukh leader **Taras Bilous**, who is also editor of a Sotsialnyi Rukh-aligned journal, *Commons*, published a widely-circulated document on OpenDemocracy.net titled "A letter to the Western Left from Kiev." The article denounces those opposing US military aid as "imagining 'NATO aggression in Ukraine'" and practicing "the anti-imperialism of idiots." He states his opposition to "those who exaggerated the influence of the far-right in Ukraine," adding: "Part of the responsibility for what is happening rests with you."

The letter quotes Leila Al-Shami, a British intellectual and writer for the ISO's *International Socialist Review* who denounced the *World Socialist Web Site* as "so-called leftists" in 2018 for our opposition to US imperialism's war in Syria. Bilous praises Al-Shami for attacking socialists who "argue that the main enemy is at home." He concludes: "There will be no compromise. Putin can plan whatever he wants... the struggle will last until Russia gets out of Ukraine and pays for all the victims and the destruction."

On April 3, ex-ISO member and current DSA member Todd Chretien moderated a DSA panel featuring Sotsialnyi Rukh leader **Vladyslav Starodubstev**, who declared that "the war creates the possibility for a push of socialist ideas in Ukraine." Starodubstev said the Ukrainian military is comprised of socialists who need weapons to fight the Russians and thereby win others to socialism.

On April 8, *International Viewpoint* published an interview with Sotsialnyi Rukh Chairman **Vitaly Dudin**, who said that socialists are joining the Ukrainian military and need weapons: "Some Social Movement activists, as well as many trade unions members, have joined the Ukrainian Territorial Defence as volunteers," and "a lot of leftists are helping as volunteers to supply the army." Dudin criticized NATO: "We believe NATO has played the role of a passive spectator in this war. Starting from the end of 2021, they have done nothing to support Ukraine with arms," he said.

On May 10, Haymarket Books hosted a panel with *Commons* co-editor **Oksana Dutchak** and **Yuliya Yurchenko** titled "How Can Feminist Solidarity help Ukraine?" which presented war and weapons shipments as necessary to protect Ukrainian women.

On May 30, *Spectre* hosted a Facebook event titled "*Spectre* presents: Ukraine, imperialism and the world economy," in which all the panelists attacked opponents of the US imperialist war in Ukraine. The event featured **Zakhar Popovych**, a member of Sotsialnyi Rukh, who declared that he was "very disappointed" by those on the left who criticize Russia but who also insist that US government is escalating the war for its own imperialist aims.

Popovych said, "For me, if we are opposing this global system of imperialism, of big powers suppressing other peoples of the world, we should support the national liberation" of Ukraine, which he called an "anti-imperialist fight. For me this is the first step to challenge the system of imperialism."

On April 13, Ashley Smith published an interview in *Spectre* with Ukrainian political figure **Yuliya Yurchenko**, who is also associated with Sotsialnyi Rukh, asking her the loaded question, "Why is it inaccurate to reduce the war" to a conflict "between the US/NATO and Russia? How does this ignore the struggle for national liberation?"

Yurchenko replied, "Reducing this war to conflict between the West and Russia overlooks Ukraine and treats it as a mere pawn between powers." She compared the struggle of the Ukrainian military to the "national liberation struggles in Africa and elsewhere," adding, "Anti-colonial thinkers and leaders taught us to give voice to them and their struggle. Ukraine is in a similar struggle."

Smith asked Yurchenko, "There is a significant debate in the

international left about what position to take on the war and what demands to raise. What do you argue we should do?” She replied, “Again, the international left must put its decolonial hat on in thinking about Ukraine. We are fighting Russia, our historic imperial oppressor. I think some people still get their vision clouded by a one-dimensional opposition to US imperialism alone. But the US is not the aggressor in this situation, Russia is.”

She concluded, “The international left must be in solidarity with Ukraine as an oppressed nation and *our fight for self-determination*. That includes our right to secure arms for our fighters and volunteers to win our freedom.”

Smith introduced Yurchenko as an author and left-wing academic. But he did not mention that this representative of Ukraine’s “fight for self-determination” is also a fellow at the pro-imperialist George Kennan Institute at Princeton’s Wilson Center, which is funded by the US Congress. The Wilson Center’s advisory council includes General David Petraeus, the Embassy of Qatar, and representatives of BP, Citi Bank, Goldman Sachs and other major corporations. Yurchenko’s byline also appears in *Jacobin* magazine.

### The slogan of “national self-determination”

At the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when the globalized character of world production exposed the bankruptcy of the Stalinist program of socialism in one country, the International Committee of the Fourth International addressed the imperialist powers’ appropriation of the slogan of “national self-determination” as a method for justifying imperialist carve-ups like that currently undertaken by the US and its European allies in Eastern Europe.

In a 1993 statement “Perspectives and Tasks of the ICFI: The Permanent Revolution Today,” David North wrote:

Communal, ethnic and chauvinist movements hide behind democratic phraseology—the slogan of self-determination, national liberation—while they pursue a policy whose economic content is the renewed enslavement of the broad masses by imperialism. They are directed not toward national liberation, in the sense that this term was understood in an earlier historical period, but to wipe out even the limited gains that were previously made by the masses.

Subsequent experiences have proven the correctness of this perspective. In 1990, the Bush administration used the Kuwaiti sheikdom’s “right to self-determination” as an excuse to invade Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. The Clinton administration cited the same right to justify the carve-up of Yugoslavia by referencing first Bosnia and then Kosovo as the basis for bloody wars that pacified the region on behalf of American and European capital at the cost of tens of thousands of lives.

A review of the political background of today’s fighters for self-determination reveals that the Ukrainian “resistance” is in reality an operation set up by US imperialism and its agents.

### The Center for Social and Labor Research: A US government front

Most of Sotsialnyi Rukh’s political leadership is or was employed by the Ukrainian Center for Social and Labor Research (CSLR), which is publicly documented to have been funded over many years by the CIA’s National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED is so openly connected to the US intelligence agencies that it is often called the “second CIA.”

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the NED deleted records of its past grants to Ukraine, but some documents are accessible using the Wayback Machine. The documents confirm that the Center for Social and Labor Research received a grant for \$22,980 in 2014 in order “to promote an awareness of fundamental rights and freedoms.”

The grant notes that “the Center will continue fostering a greater awareness of the freedom of assembly in Ukraine” and that “as part of a larger national advocacy campaign, the Center will monitor protest activity throughout the country, share the data with campaign activists [and the US intelligence agencies], distribute them through social media, and produce 12 reports.”

Information on workers’ strikes and protests throughout the country were doubtless of high value to the NED (and the CIA), as US government funding for the project continued for several years.

According to the CV of longtime CSLR director Volodymyr Ishchenko, the CSLR was “supported by National Endowment for Democracy (in 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2015) and by International Renaissance Foundation (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013)” as well as by the Volkswagen Foundation. Ishchenko is the founder of the Center for Society Research, which is also funded by the NED. The International Renaissance Foundation is George Soros’ main Non-Governmental Organization in Ukraine. Soros has recently called for all-out war against Russia. Ishchenko has written numerous articles for *Jacobin* magazine.

Sotsialnyi Rukh leaders who are or were employed by CSLR at the time it received NED grants include:

- **Zakhar Popovych**, the Sotsialnyi Rukh leader featured by Ashley Smith’s *Spectre*. One 2015 CSLR document references “Zakhar Popovych, an expert of Center for Social and Labor Research and a member of organizational committee of Social’nyi Rukh (‘Social Movement’), a Ukrainian left-wing political party currently under formation.”

- Sotsialnyi Rukh Chairman **Vitaly Dudin**, who apparently still works for the CSLR, according to his author’s bio on OpenDemocracy.net., which reads: “Vitaly Dudin is a legal analyst at Ukraine’s Center for Social and Labor Research, which was created in 2013 as an independent not-for-profit institution dedicated to the analysis of socio-economic problems, collective protests, labour relations and conflicts.”

- **Oksana Dutchak**, currently deputy director of the CSLR and co-editor of *Commons*, the Sotsialnyi Rukh-aligned journal. The work of Dutchak (who appeared at the Haymarket Books feminist event) is referred to on CSLR’s website as being “supported by the Rosa Luxembourg [sic] Foundation, from the funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany.”

- Sotsialnyi Rukh leader **Denys Pilash** is or was also employed by the CSLR and is the author of reports on social protests and economic conditions in the country.

### Sotsialnyi Rukh’s ties to Solidarity Center and the AFL-CIO

Sotsialnyi Rukh is also connected to the AFL-CIO’s Solidarity Center, an institution so closely linked to the intelligence agencies that it is referred to in popular parlance as the AFL-CIA. The Solidarity Center forms part of the NED.

In 2015, Dudin and Pilash co-authored a CSLR report detailing a conference during which Pilash shared the stage with Tristan Masat, the coordinator of Solidarity Center's programs in Ukraine.

Dudin and Pilash write that Masat (whom they acknowledge as a representative of Solidarity Center) "advised the representatives of unions and NGOs present at the conference to develop membership-based organizations for mass mobilization (particularly the campaign against the new labor law)."

This article was also posted on *Commons*. Contemporaneous social media posts show Sotsialnyi Rukh took Masat's advice seriously and made the campaign against the proposed labor law a central political focus.

By Sotsialnyi Rukh's own admission, its membership consists mostly of individuals recruited out of the Ukrainian trade unions that are dominated by Solidarity Center.

A 2021 report published by the CIA-linked USAID, titled "External Evaluation of the Global Labor Program," gushes over the role of the Solidarity Center in Ukraine. The US government has developed very close ties with the Ukrainian Confederation of Free Trade Unions (KVPU) and the Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU), organizations founded "as a protest against the existing 'old' post-USSR union," the report explains.

A 2019 statement "Sotsialnyi Rukh: Who we are" states: "Most of us are involved in independent trade union movement, including the Independent Trade Union of Miners (NPGU), the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers (parts of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine—KVPU), and some militant factions of Federation of Trade Unions (FPU)." In a November 2018 Facebook post by Sotsialnyi Rukh that was shared by current Sotsialnyi Rukh Chairman Vitaly Dudin, Dudin is referred to as the "NPGU headquarters representative."

### **Solidarity Center and USAID prioritize training "young leaders"**

In 2014, Solidarity Center established Labor Initiatives, a national program in Ukraine aimed at training and recruiting Ukrainian activists. According to the 2021 USAID report, "a significant expansion of Labor Initiatives started in 2015, which also led to an increase in staff members."

This corresponds to the founding of Sotsialnyi Rukh, which, according to the party's "Who are we" statement, grew out of the 2013-14 Maidan protests.

According to USAID, Labor Initiatives and Solidarity Center began to hold "three annual intensive youth leadership trainings, known as 'summer school,' which include both trade unions and allied community advocates that provide extensive one-on-one and small group mentoring with young worker leaders." The report explained that the summer schools led to the successful recruitment of many pro-US activists: "Many activists who attended summer schools as rank-and-file participants now have positions at different levels of both the KVPU and FPU Union structures," the organizations which Sotsialnyi Rukh says "most of" its membership came out of.

The connection between Solidarity Center and Sotsialnyi Rukh is not a secret. In 2021, the Sotsialnyi Rukh-aligned Ukraine Solidarity Campaign published an article by Inna Kudinska and George Sandul, who run Solidarity Center's Labor Initiatives. The article was originally published on the website of the Solidarity Center's program and was simply reposted by the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign with a link to the AFL-CIO page.

Sotsyalnyi Rukh also regularly promotes NPGU miners' union

president Mykhailo Volynets, who is a self-acknowledged US government asset. Volynets was awarded the AFL-CIO George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award for his support in the US-backed "Orange Revolution" that took place in Ukraine in 2004. In one 2015 article, Sotsyalnyi Rukh featured Volynets "marking May Day by laying flowers at the monument to Ukraine's revolutionary national poet, Taras Shevchenko."

According to a March 2022 report by *Covert Action Magazine*, Volynets was photographed meeting with fascist Azov Battalion leader Ihor "The Suffocator" Kniazhankysky and attended a meeting in 2014 with American Federation of Teachers president and National Endowment for Democracy executive board member Randi Weingarten. Volynets is quoted in a 2005 Radio Free Europe article as saying, "Our protest movement grew into a workers' movement. The Solidarity Center visited us," and soon the leaders of "the strike committees became leaders of trade unions."

The 2021 USAID report on the activity of Solidarity Center in Ukraine also states that the US government is working with the German government to develop grassroots forces on the ground in Ukraine: "The SC [Solidarity Center] program is designed to work with direct beneficiaries, who are primarily independent trade unions of Ukraine. SC also engages to varying extents with civil society organizations, the ILO Office in Kyiv, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), the Ukrainian Parliament and other foreign and local institutions present in Ukraine."

Volynets was also a special invited guest at the AFL-CIO's 2022 convention in Philadelphia.

### **Taras Bilous and the "Letter to the Western Left from Kiev"**

Taras Bilous, a leader of Sotsialnyi Rukh and editor of its associated publication, *Commons*, has played a central role in the international campaign for war in Ukraine. Bilous deserves special attention because his February 25 article "Letter to the Western Left from Kiev" set the tone for the international campaign against left-wing opposition to imperialist war. He regularly comments on Ashley Smith's personal Facebook page, defending Smith's posts.

First, Bilous' letter was published on OpenDemocracy.net, whose largest funders are the Soros Open Society Institute and the CIA-linked Ford Foundation. In 2021, OpenDemocracy.net received over 100,000 British pounds from both the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Institute. It is common practice for Sotsialnyi Rukh members to publish articles on OpenDemocracy.net.

In a subsequent Twitter post, Bilous explained that OpenDemocracy.net translated the document and distributed it to a number of international publications on his behalf. Those publications and organizations which re-published Bilous' letter or positively referenced it include: *International Viewpoint*, the Washington DC Democratic Socialists of America, The Anarchist Library, *New Politics*, *Green Left Weekly*, *Dissent*, the International Workers League-Fourth International, *The Nation*, Workers Liberty, and News and Letters. Ashley Smith was among the first who shared Bilous' initial tweet about the letter.

But Bilous is not an authentic representative of "the left" whose word should be taken seriously by left-wing people internationally. He has close ties with institutions that are funded by the American state.

In February 2016, the NGO "New Donbass" posted a photograph of Bilous speaking at the Ukrainian House of Free People. That year, New Donbass received several thousand euros from the government of Latvia, a NATO power.

In June 2016, Bilous is photographed attending another event at the

House of Free People, and he is depicted in front of a banner that says “USAID” on it. A 2017 article in USAID’s magazine *FrontLines* acknowledges the organization was founded “with help from USAID.”

In November 2018, the OZON Public Monitoring Group posted a photograph of Bilous attending an event at the Center for Civil Liberties. The latter NGO’s website states that “The OZON Public Monitoring Group is an initiative of the Center for Civil Liberties, which exercises public control over law enforcement agencies, courts and local governments in various regions of Ukraine.” In addition, the project reports on protests throughout the country (it “monitors freedom of peaceful assembly”).

The Center for Civil Liberties is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, the US State Department, the Open Society Institute and the European Commission.

NED documents show that it has given \$139,900 worth of grants to the center in the last several years. One NED grant states that the purpose is to “engage new activists” and convene trainings for those “activists.”

In December 2018, Bilous and fellow Sotsialnyi Rukh leader Denys Pilash spoke on Hromadske Radio, which is also funded by the NED and received at least one grant (to “promote access to independent information and foster democratic discourse”).

An article posted on Hromadske’s website notes, “The guests of the studio are a journalist, a member of the public organization ‘Social Movement’ Denis Pilash and a historian from the editorial board of the magazine ‘Common’ Taras Bilous.”

In November 2019, Bilous also appeared at a public event held by the IZOLYATSIA Platform for Cultural Initiatives, an organization that was also funded by the NED. According to its website, IZOLYATSIA carries out its work “with the support from the National Endowment for Democracy.”

In June, following the publication of Smith’s article calling for support for the Ukrainian “resistance,” an unknown group published a statement “With the resistance of the Ukrainian people for its victory against the aggression,” which begins, “As in the days of the Vietnamese people’s liberation struggle, we have always been on the side of the oppressed and aggressed peoples.” The article takes up the themes in Smith’s June 3 *Tempest* article and concludes, like Smith does, by calling for arming Ukraine.

The letter was signed by Bilous and fellow Sotsialnyi Rukh leader Vladislav Starodubstev, as well as a series of leading pro-war figures. This list includes Ashley Smith, fellow *Spectre* editor Charles Post, *NewPol* editor Dan La Botz, Susan Weissman, Wendy Thompson, Stephen R. Shalom, Simon Pirani, Eric Poulos (nephew of former Stalinist agent Sylvia Ageloff), Gilbert Achcar, Zofia Malisz, Rohini Hensman, Michael Löwy, Olivier Besancenot and many more.

### Principled opposition to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine

The politically principled opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is rooted in a Marxist appraisal of the character of the Russian state in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was carried out with the help of the Stalinist bureaucracy and brought to power an oligarchic capitalist class that is incapable of opposing the imperialist encirclement of the Russian Federation and of the Eurasian landmass as a whole.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) opposes Putin’s invasion, but not by solidarizing ourselves with either the gangsters in Kiev or their puppet-masters in Washington and London. We

oppose labeling Russia as “imperialist.” Such a label rips Russia out of any objective analysis of its position within the world economy and its historical development. It serves only to legitimize American imperialism’s longstanding efforts to break up Russia and transform it into a modern colony. The same applies for claims that China is an “imperialist” power.

The attitude of the International Committee is the polar opposite of the pro-imperialist organizations around the Democratic Party. In a May 17, 2022 statement, we wrote:

Marxists define their attitude toward a given war by analyzing the profound historical and material forces that give rise to it, and which are manifested in the development of the conflict. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), while opposing the invasion of Ukraine by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s government, places the current war in the context of a broader Marxist analysis of the entire 20th century, in particular of the historical processes triggered by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent three decades of imperialist war waged by the US and NATO.

The Marxist position is the position of revolutionary defeatism, in Russia, Ukraine, the United States and every country involved in the war. The May 17 statement explained:

Nearly 90 years ago, Trotsky explained that “A ‘socialist’ who preaches national defense is a petty-bourgeois reactionary at the service of decaying capitalism.” The task of Marxists in Ukraine is not to defend their “own” imperialist-backed national state against Russia in the war, but to advance an internationalist revolutionary perspective based on socialist defeatism to unify and mobilize the Ukrainian, Russian and international working class against the NATO powers, as well as the Kiev and Kremlin regimes.

The Russian Marxists must also base their perspective on socialist defeatism, mobilizing masses of workers and youth against the Putin regime with the demand for an immediate end of the reactionary invasion. The only allies of the Russian workers are their Ukrainian and international class sisters and brothers. This position is an integral part of a single program for the Ukrainian and international working class based on a world socialist revolutionary strategy.

This means building the ICFI in every country and mobilizing the working class for socialist revolution.



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