

Ukrainian youth speak on war, social catastrophe: “The military is grabbing draft evaders everywhere”

Clara Weiss
15 June 2023

Amidst the war hysteria and propaganda accompanying the NATO-backed counteroffensive against Russia, there is virtually nothing in the Western bourgeois media accurately depicting the immense social crisis and concerns of Ukrainian workers and youth, the horrendous toll of the war and a growing sense of fatigue with it in the Ukrainian population.

In just over one year of war, the Ukrainian army has suffered an estimated 200,000 deaths or more. Considering the average rate of 4 wounded for 1 dead, this would indicate that another 800,000 people have been wounded. This would mean that, out of the pre-war population of just under 39 million, 0.5 percent have died in the war, and 2.6 percent have been killed or wounded. If these ratios were applied to the US with its population of 332 million, the equivalent would be 1,660,000 million dead and 8,632,000 people killed or wounded. An additional 8.5 million people have fled the country, leaving behind only 29 million, not all of whom live in territories controlled by the Zelensky government.

Even in small towns, hundreds of men and youth have died. While the government has now banned the taking of pictures at cemeteries, images of mass graves across the country continue to circulate on social media.

The vast majority of those dying are young people and workers. While more and more people are trying to avoid conscription, doing so requires, above all, financial resources, which the vast majority of the population do not have. Even before the war, Ukraine, along with Moldova, was the poorest country in Europe.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke with several Ukrainian youth about the situation in the country and the moods within the population.

One of them reported to the WSW, “Those who were previously unemployed remain unemployed. People also fear to get a job because then the risk is extremely high that you will be taken into the army,” since managers work closely with the army.

“The military is grabbing draft evaders everywhere. They wait in the streets, in parking lots near shopping malls, they go into gyms, homes, and so on. They will serve draft summonses

and take people—some of them as young as 16—away to war.”

Under the state of martial law that was imposed in Ukraine at the beginning of the war, men aged 18 and older are banned from leaving the country.

He explained,

There are more people that do not want to serve than there are those who want to serve. Dozens of people are trying to flee by swimming across the Dnietsr river [to cross into Moldova]. Some of them drown. There is also widespread corruption in the army. Those who don't want to serve can buy themselves out by paying huge sums.

He continued,

But there are also some who want to serve as volunteers in the Ukrainian army. The deep divisions in society remain. There are still informers in the cities who give information to the Russian army. Many people secretly hope for the arrival of the Russian army. Recently, the formation of a volunteer corps of Ukrainians in the Russian army was announced. It was called the “Little Russian Liberation Army” after the imperial name for Ukraine [Little Russia] in Tsarist Russia. How slavish that sounds!

I sometimes think about what is now happening far away from me, at the frontline. I have had these thoughts especially often since I've watched “All Quiet on the Western Front” on Netflix, which is based on a novel by Erich Maria Remarque. Personally, I feel empathy for both sides.

There are many discussions about this war, many are talking about what caused it, and what the role of Russia is in the conflict. If I compare this war to the war that was fought during the Second World War on the

territory of Soviet Ukraine, I come to the conclusion that that war was indeed a “war in defense of the fatherland” because my ancestors fought to defend the fatherland of the workers [the Soviet Union], but today this does not exist anymore.

Two other youth also spoke about a growing sense of fatigue with the war. One teenager said, “The attitude toward the war is changing. The patriots and nationalists have already died at the front. Those who remain are moderately minded and tired of the war.”

A 22-year old stated, “There is a certain fatigue in society that you can observe in relation to the war, but it is forbidden to even think in that direction.”

In addition to the horrendous human toll of the war, Ukrainian workers and youth are also hit by extremely high prices under conditions where the Zelensky government continues to impose wage cuts and social austerity. As of June 12, the World Map by the World Food Program reported that over 8.7 million people—i.e., almost one in three Ukrainians who are still living in the country—have “insufficient food consumption,” and 7 million were “using crisis or above crisis food-based coping.”

The 22-year-old said,

The social situation is catastrophic, prices are rising, taxes are rising, but the salaries don’t change. Many people are forced to cut back on what they eat. The elderly of pension age are forced to sell their valuables in pawnshops, which dot the entire city.

It is virtually impossible for young people to find a job where they are not subject to anti-human behavior by their employer, on top of horrible working conditions.

Another youth said,

If we’re speaking about the social moods, they waver between a critique of the Zelensky regime and support for it. Many are dissatisfied with the rising prices for housing and utilities. People respond to the rise in prices negatively and actively, but this protest does go not beyond discussions among friends and neighbors. One cannot say at this point that there is growing discontent in the masses with the Zelensky regime. There is still chauvinism toward the Russians. Many expect that the war might end soon with a victory of Ukraine.

The youth reported that there is a widespread critical attitude toward the promotion of fascist forces, who stand in the tradition of the World War II-era Nazi collaborators Stepan Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, by the Zelensky government. However, these discussions are marked both by a lack of historical clarity about the history of the October Revolution, the role of Stalinism and the fascists themselves, as well as fear of repercussions in the case of public protest.

The 22-year-old told the WSWS, “There is a condemnation in society of the promotion of fascist figures, but it is worth noting that this condemnation takes place behind the scenes in order to avoid problems.”

He added,

There are some who remember with nostalgia the achievements of the USSR in terms of social benefits, which are now the privilege of the rich. This phenomenon is not widespread, because the years of rabid anti-communist hysteria have created an understanding in society of what we can and cannot talk about. It is also worth noting that there has been a total informational brainwashing of the younger generation. The government is imposing on it a false understanding of the essence of socialism and communism and the October Revolution. By sowing a false understanding of socialism and communism, the American puppets in power have further strengthened the elitist system of capitalist exploitation.

The overall sentiment, he indicated, is one of anxiety and fear for the future. “Everyone expects that either their home will be hit by a bomb in the near future or that there will be a further deterioration of the social conditions confronting the majority of the population. Personally, I only have a vague sense of how there could be a way forward. There seem to be several potential future courses of events, but none of them bode well for the working masses.”

A young supporter of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Ukraine said, “I think that the Ukrainian question cannot be resolved within the borders of Ukraine itself: The Ukrainian question can only be resolved on the world arena. I don’t see a solution to the Ukrainian question in a victory of Russia or the US, but only in the unity of the working class of Russia, Ukraine and the entire world.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact