

Beating the drum for war: The pro-imperialist tour of the pseudo left

Clara Weiss

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Since September 3, four individuals tied to the International Pabloite tendency and its outlet, *International Viewpoint*, have been touring the US to beat the drum for an escalation of the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. The title of the tour is “Resisting Russian Imperialism: Ukraine’s Struggle for Self-Determination.”

The individuals involved are: Ilya Budraitskis and Ilya Matveev, both leading figures of the Pabloite Russian Socialist Movement (RSM) and now based at UC Berkeley; Denys Bondar, a physics professor at Tulane University; and Hanna Perekhoda, who is based at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Bondar and Perekhoda are both members of the Ukrainian *Sotsialnyi Rukh* (Social Movement), an organization that the WWSW exposed last year as a setup of the US State Department and CIA, from which it has received substantial funding.

Both *Sotsialnyi Rukh* and the RSM have close ties to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a pseudo-left faction within the Democratic Party, and *International Viewpoint*, the international publication of the Pabloite International Secretariat, which emerged in the post-war period as a revisionist tendency that sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into the Stalinist bureaucracy. The tour was organized by the so-called Ukraine Solidarity Network, which has less than 120 followers on Twitter, as of this writing, and whose leadership and origins are obscure.

After kicking off their speakers’ tour at the DSA-affiliated Socialism 2023 Conference in early September, they have spoken at Loyola University, Chicago, an LGBTQ center in New York City and are scheduled to speak at UC Berkeley on September 13. Budraitskis and Perekhoda were also interviewed on Democracy Now! as well as by Ashley Smith in the *Nation*. Smith, now a member of the DSA, played a prominent role in supporting the US imperialist operation in Syria while still a member of the now defunct International Socialist Organization (ISO).

To state the main conclusion at the onset: The tour has nothing to do with educating anyone about the origins and dangers of the war, much less calling for its end. On the contrary, it is a pro-war tour. Its main purpose is to prop up the faltering US war propaganda of the “unprovoked” invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime and advocate for more weapons for Ukraine, i.e., an extension of the bloodbath.

One of the clearest signs of the pro-war character of this tour is that it completely covers up the horrific reality of this war. In not one of their public appearances did any of the speakers even mention the staggering death toll of this war, now estimated to be as high as 350,000 or even 400,000, meaning that the number of wounded would be in the millions. Ukraine had become the most heavily mined country in the world, even before the Biden administration began sending cluster bombs to the war zone, one of the most brutal weapons of modern-day warfare.

Amid this unfolding bloodbath, the principal demand of Perekhoda, Budraitskis, Matveev and Bondar is: more weapons. As Hanna Perekhoda put it at the Socialism 2023 Conference: “We ask to increase military, financial, and diplomatic support for the Ukrainian state.” All their claims

and statements to justify this demand are lies and distortions of political and historical reality. We can only discuss a few of the most important ones.

Lie #1: The war was not provoked by NATO

Just like the principal outlets of the US state and ruling class—the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and CNN—Perekhoda, Matveev, Budraitskis and Bondar claim that the war in Ukraine has no history. They ignore the reality that, since 1997, NATO has expanded to Russia’s borders; a far-right coup was organized in Kiev in 2014 by the US and Germany, triggering a civil war in the East; Ukraine was armed to the teeth by NATO in the years that followed; and NATO staged multiple, highly provocative, large-scale exercises in the Black Sea region and Eastern Europe in the immediate lead-up to the Russian invasion. As Perekhoda explicitly stated in an interview with Democracy Now! “This war is not a response to some external threat for Russia emanating from NATO.”

At the Socialism 2023 conference, Perekhoda even claimed that NATO could not be seen as “an objective threat to the Russian security.” One could argue that the fact that this supposedly “non-threatening” alliance has bombed a dozen countries since 1991 alone—including Iraq, with up to a million dead, Afghanistan, several countries in Yugoslavia and Libya—might suggest otherwise.

If anything, the RSM’s Budraitskis went even further in his endorsement of NATO, suggesting that for the Baltic States and Poland, as well as Georgia—which is not a member of NATO—the military alliance “is a question of guarantees for their independent existence,” effectively advocating its further expansion.

On its surface, there is a glaring logical contradiction between these two claims—one suggests that NATO is “no external threat” to Russia, while the other holds that NATO expansion is the only possible guarantee of “independence” against Russia. But the political and class logic behind these claims is perfectly coherent: They advocate complete support for NATO, an imperialist alliance of thieves and murderers, that has wreaked havoc in the Middle East, North Africa and southeastern Europe and that now bears principal responsibility for the most horrific bloodbath on European soil since the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945.

Lie #2: The far-right in Ukraine plays no significant role in politics and the army

In response to a question by Democracy Now! about the Azov Battalion, which has helped train American and other neo-Nazis since its inception in the wake of the 2014 coup, Perekhoda insisted that the Ukrainian far-right after 2014 “did not manage to become legitimate [a] political subject in institutional politics.” She continued, “In Ukrainian parliament, you would not find right-wing parties represented. They were represented before 2014, but now this is not the case.”

These are blatant lies. The government that came to power in the February 2014 putsch included the neo-fascist Svoboda party, which openly places itself in the traditions of the Nazi collaborators of Stepan

Bandera's Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The OUN was principally involved in the Holocaust in Ukraine and is responsible for the massacre of up to 100,000 Poles in 1943–1944.

Indeed, this was the first time since the end of World War II that an openly neo-fascist and anti-Semitic party joined a European government. Joe Biden—then vice president under Barack Obama—as well as leading German politicians like President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (then the foreign minister) shook the hands of neo-Nazi Oleh Tyanybok, the leader of Svoboda.

Since then, Ukraine's neo-Nazi forces have been systematically armed and trained by the imperialist powers. As a result, their role in the state apparatus and politics far outweighs their support in the population, but this makes them no less dangerous. Parliamentary parties like the European Solidarity party of Petro Poroshenko, the president of Ukraine from 2014–2019, while not openly neo-fascist, have extensive ties to Azov and other far-right formations. The chief of the Ukrainian army, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, is an open admirer of Stepan Bandera.

Perekhoda is not confused about this reality. She deliberately hides it. Paraded as a “historian” on Democracy Now!, her academic work exposes her as an adherent of the views and historical falsification of the Ukrainian far-right nationalists.

In a chapter on the “Ukrainian revolution, 1917–1920” in a recently published book, Perekhoda managed to discuss the period of civil war in Ukraine, which followed the 1917 Russian Revolution, and the politics of the Ukrainian nationalists without mentioning the term “anti-Semitism.” The fact that these three years saw the massacre of an estimated 200,000 Jews, above all by anti-Bolshevik forces and Ukrainian nationalists and most of them on the territory of contemporary Ukraine, is simply of no concern. Nor does she care to mention that German imperialism occupied the country until the November 1918 revolution brought about the end of Germany's involvement in the war.

Instead, Perekhoda claims that the Ukrainian national movement forced upon the Bolsheviks its territorial conception of Ukraine, writing: “It was not Bolsheviks who ‘invented’ Ukraine: since the end of 1917, Ukraine had imposed itself upon them as a new political reality, including in its territorial dimensions.” (Hanna Perekhoda, “The Ukrainian Revolution, the Bolsheviks, and the Inertia of Empire,” *Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People, and Culture Revisited*, ed. by Olena Palko and Manuel Férrez Gil, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag 2023, 159).

These are the words of a far-right Ukrainian ethno-nationalist and anti-communist. At the very least, Perekhoda is entirely indifferent to the sinister record of the Ukrainian nationalists who have, time and again, including after World War I and during World War II, combined their collaboration with imperialist powers with bloody massacres of ethnic and religious minorities and the violent suppression of the Ukrainian working class.

Lie #3: “The Ukrainians” are united in their determination to fight against Russia whatever it takes

At the Socialism 2023 Conference, Bondar, also a member of *Sotsialnyi Rukh*, insisted that the Ukrainian population, after 18 months of war, is still united in its desire to fight against Russia, even if this means nuclear war. Citing some poll, he claimed, “89 percent of respondents said that we should carry on fighting even if Russia is using a tactical nuclear weapon against a Ukrainian city; 89 percent, so there is no way in hell on earth Ukrainians will give up fighting, there is just no way” [huge applause].

Leaving aside the questionable origins of this poll, what is the reality that Bondar and his cheering audience at the Socialism 2023 conference ignored?

Since the beginning of this war, 13 opposition parties, including several left-wing parties who oppose the war, like the United of Left Forces—For a New Socialism Party! have been banned and violently persecuted. People can now be arbitrarily declared “traitors to the state” and thrown into

prison, without evidence and without a trial. Tens of thousands of young men have enrolled in university education, and hundreds of thousands have fled the country in order to avoid being drafted to the war. In order to replenish its rapidly shrinking ranks, the Ukrainian military has for months resorted to effectively kidnapping men from off the streets. This is not to mention the state-sponsored promotion of virulent anti-Russian sentiments, including with bans of Russian literature and culture, and the systematic falsifications of history.

The reasons for Bondar's “omissions” are clear enough: A look at his faculty page at Tulane University and his personal LinkedIn profile reveals that the man who is claiming that millions of Ukrainian men are eagerly going into the slaughter has, for almost a decade, been funded by the US Army.

Out of five awards Bondar has received since 2016, three were by the US military. In 2016, he was part of the Air Force Young Investigator Research Program. In 2018, he participated in the Defense University Research Instrumentation Program sponsored by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. And in 2019, he received the Young Faculty Award from DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency” of the Department of Defense. According to the US Army Magazine, his lab has also worked for the US Army Combat Capabilities Development Command's Army Research Laboratory, and has employed undergraduate students who funded their apprenticeship at his lab with funds from Army Educational Research Program.

The statements by Bondar are despicable war propaganda, uttered by a man on the payroll of the same US military that has murdered millions of Iraqis, Afghans, Syrians, Vietnamese and countless more civilians in other parts of the world. It is US imperialism that demands a continuation of the war “until the last Ukrainian,” not the Ukrainian people.

Lie #4: The principal threat to the Putin regime emanates from the pro-NATO Russian opposition in the oligarchy and middle class

Central to the line of the Pabloites on this war tour is the claim that the Putin regime, in launching this war, was responding not to an external, but an “internal threat”: that posed by Russian “civil society” since the protests of 2011–2012 as well as of the “democratizing” tendencies that “a democratic” and “prosperous” Ukraine on Russia's borders would foster. Thus, Perekhoda stated at the Socialism 2023 Conference:

This war is a response to a subjective and internal threat to the Putin clan who have seized control of the state apparatus and have seized control of all the natural resources of this country. You know, it is not easy to preserve power in a country where 1 percent of the population owns 75 percent of the total wealth. That's why the regime does everything it can to suppress democratic tendencies in the neighborhood and its own country.

This is a confusing amalgam of distortions and half-truths. While it is certainly true that the Russian regime is an oligarchic regime, so is the Ukrainian regime. Far from “prosperity” and “democracy,” in reality, pre-war Ukraine was a country that was ruled by a bunch of corrupt and criminal oligarchs while counting, along with Moldova, as the poorest country in Europe. As for Ukraine as the supposed spearhead of “democracy” on the borders of Russia, suffice it to say that the country underwent a coup in 2014 that was heavily backed by the imperialist powers, creating conditions where far-right forces like Azov were free to terrorize ethnic minorities like the Sinti and Roma, along with opponents of NATO and the Ukrainian regime.

The forces dominating the protest movement of 2011–2012 and what Perekhoda and Budraitskis call “Russian civil society” are no more “democratic” than the right-wing nationalist tendencies that dominated

the Maidan protest movement in Kiev that led up to the 2014 coup. Socially, both protest movements were dominated by privileged layers of the middle class, of Kiev, Moscow and St. Petersburg, respectively. In Russia, as the WSWS has documented, Alexei Navalny, the principal figure of the NATO-backed opposition since the 2011–2012 protests, has been a co-organizer of far-right marches. He has extensive ties to sections of both the Russian and the American ruling class.

The Pabloites of the Russian Socialist Movement, under the leadership of Budraitskis and Matveev, have oriented for over a decade toward propping up Navalny and his alliance with the far-right and various Stalinist forces. Far from opposing the *class rule* of the oligarchy, these forces oppose the *rule of one particular faction of the oligarchy*—that represented by Putin and his allies. They seek a redistribution of the wealth of the top 1 percent to other factions of the oligarchy that were disempowered under Putin and layers of the upper middle class that feel that they deserve far greater privileges than they already have.

Many within this layer—including Budraitskis and Matveev themselves—have fled Russia since the beginning of the war and are now advancing their careers at universities in NATO countries. They view the war not in terms of the lives destroyed or the threat of the nuclear annihilation of the planet, but in terms of book contracts, fellowships, speaking engagements and other very real career opportunities that imperialism provides them.

It is on these social forces that US imperialism bases itself in its ongoing operation to bring about a regime change in Russia. Indeed, the replacement of the Putin regime by another regime that would be directly subservient to the foreign policy and economic interests of NATO is a primary goal of this war.

Ilya Budraitskis, Ilya Matveev and their RSM speak for a social layer that seeks to benefit from this operation and an imperialist carve-up of Russia into a series of statelets. This is what they call “civil society” and the “democratization” of Russia.

Their false claims not only obscure the political and social interests of the RSM and US imperialism in this war, but also the character of the Putin regime itself. The truth is that both the Putin regime and the NATO-backed faction of the oligarchy around Navalny share the same historical origins and class interests. Like the Ukrainian oligarchy, the Russian oligarchy emerged out of the destruction of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991. For both oligarchies, the main threat is not some amorphous “civil society,” composed of sections of the oligarchy and privileged layers of the middle class, but the Russian, Ukrainian and international working class. It is on this class that all genuine opposition to this war must be based.

Lie #5: Opposition to NATO’s war in Ukraine means support for the Putin regime and “Russian imperialism”

Underlying all the arguments advanced by these forces is that any opposition to the war in Ukraine by NATO signifies support for the Putin regime and what they call “Russian imperialism.” This is a lie whose principal purpose is to intimidate and discredit genuine left-wing opposition to this war.

The Trotskyist movement has opposed the Russian invasion from the very beginning from the socialist left, not the imperialist right. In its first statement on the war, published on February 24, 2022, the International Committee of the Fourth International insisted:

Despite the provocations and threats by the US and NATO powers, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine must be opposed by socialists and class-conscious workers. ... What is required is not a return to the pre-1917 foreign policy of tsarism, but, rather, a revival, in Russia and throughout the world, of the socialist internationalism that inspired the October Revolution of 1917 and

led to the creation of the Soviet Union as a workers state. The invasion of Ukraine, whatever the justifications given by the Putin regime, will serve only to divide the Russian and Ukrainian working class and, moreover, serve the interests of US and European imperialism.

Last fall, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), along with its sister organization, the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists in Russia and Ukraine, initiated a campaign to build a global movement of youth and workers against this war. Since then, the IYSSE has held an online webinar with speakers from throughout the world and organized an international meeting series against the war last spring, with meetings on five continents.

In this work, we have developed a consistent, socialist and Marxist opposition both to the imperialist powers and the oligarchic regimes in Russia and Ukraine. However, we have also insisted that workers and youth must reject the claim that Russia is an “imperialist” country because this is historically and economically false and serves as a political cover for the operations of imperialism.

Contemporary Russia emerged out of the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, the culmination of the decades-long reaction against the socialist October Revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy. At the time, the Pabloites, out of which the RSM emerged, supported this social counterrevolution which destroyed all the conquests of 1917. But capitalist restoration did not bring “peace and prosperity” nor did it provide the basis for any substantial development of Russia as a major economic “world power.” Rather, the restoration of capitalism gave rise, in both Russia and Ukraine, to criminal oligarchies that have plundered the wealth of society but have been incapable of establishing any basis for substantial economic development. The Russian oligarchs’ primary source of income, along with the exploitation of the working class, is the selling off of raw material resources to other countries.

Neither of these oligarchies have been or can be independent from the imperialist powers. While Ukraine is now ruled by a faction of the oligarchy that has transformed the country into a staging ground for an imperialist-provoked bloodbath, the entire war strategy of the Putin regime has been based on the desperate and bankrupt conception, inherited from Stalinism, that it could use limited military pressure to negotiate terms for a deal of “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism.

But the imperialist powers are bent not on negotiations but the imperialist subjugation of the entire region, which is home to some of the world’s largest energy resources, as well as vast reserves in rare earths and critical mineral resources. The claim that Russia is “imperialist” serves to cover up the real economic and geopolitical war aims of the imperialist powers, as well as their strategy to break up the country into a series of statelets whose energy and other resources can be directly exploited by imperialism. It is a strategy that threatens not only a series of wars and civil wars, but also raises the very real threat of nuclear war.

Lest anyone think that this is an exaggeration, it is worth recalling the strategy and brutality that underlay imperialist policy in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s: Basing themselves on sections of the corrupt elites that emerged out of the restoration of capitalism, as well as openly fascist forces like the adherents of the Croatian Ustasha, the imperialist powers deliberately fostered ethnic and religious conflict. The resulting series of civil wars and NATO bombing raids have turned the region into a socioeconomic wasteland. A repetition of this scenario in the former Soviet Union, which is home to the largest nuclear arsenals in the world outside the United States, would be even more devastating, and far more dangerous.

There is another element of the Yugoslav wars that bears remembering: It was over these wars in the 1990s that a whole layer of the middle class

ex-left and in particular the Pabloites began to fully support NATO, based on the fraudulent propaganda of “humanitarian interventions” and the “right to national self-determination.” In its analysis of this phenomenon, the ICFI stressed the class basis for this shift to the right:

A whole layer of those who were radicalized by the experiences of Vietnam, the events of May-June 1968 in France and the militant labor conflicts of the late 1960s and early 1970s abandoned, during the past two decades, their opposition to imperialism and reincorporated themselves into the middle class life. Of these ex-radicals, not a few saw their material fortunes skyrocket with the stock market takeoff in the 1990s. This has produced a dramatic realignment in their politics.

A quarter century and many wars and millions of dead later, the social privileges of this layer are far greater and, in its integration into the state and war machine, is far more advanced. The DSA-promoted war tour by the RSM and Sotsial’nyi Rukh, no doubt sponsored by the army and discussed with the CIA, is a clear expression of that. It confirms, yet again, that what separates these tendencies from the working class and the Trotskyist movement are the most fundamental class interests and, for that matter, a river of blood. Workers and youth must treat these lackeys of imperialism with the contempt they deserve.



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