

## **The war in Ukraine and the position of socialists: the nature and roles of Russia, the US and Western Europe**

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### **Introduction**

Many people on the left have a 'neutrality' position on the war in Ukraine. Their argument goes: 'The war is between two imperialisms, Russia and the US (or US plus Europe in NATO), and we should be neutral in inter-imperialist wars. More concretely, the war is the result of aggression and encirclement by the West against Russia since 1991, to which Putin has reacted. Specifically, Russia has been 'provoked' into the war by NATO's (or the US's) offer of membership to Ukraine. We should therefore call for 'diplomacy' before the invasion, and now a cease fire. The Ukraine should declare that it will never seek to join NATO, and NATO should say it will never include Ukraine. We should oppose western countries imposing economic sanctions on Russia.' This is the position of the Stop the War Coalition, but also of other currents and individuals (Yanis Varoufakis: 'The only issue today should be to stop the war and to secure the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. The only way that could happen is a Washington-Moscow agreement that Russia withdraws in exchange for a commitment of Ukrainian neutrality. Anything else is war mongering.')

Against this view, I argue that Russia is an imperialist country with over-accumulated money capital which it seeks outlets for abroad, in particular in other countries of the former USSR. It implements this through seeking to make a 'protectorate' of those countries, that is, using Russian military power to maintain governments aligned with Moscow and open economically to Russian capital. This is normal behaviour of imperialism: the US did this in Western Europe in 1948-91. But here's a difference: when other countries of the former USSR resist the Russian protectorate by seeking to align themselves politically or economically with the west, Russia has reacted with military violence and annexation: Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. For socialists, this violence is unjustifiable. The targetted countries have the right to resist by any means possible.

Accordingly, Russia's invasion is not justified by the US's stance towards Russia. For socialists it has no justification. We should support Ukraine in defending itself against Russia in any way that it sees fit, and we should help them to do so. Economic sanctions by western powers are the only way that Russia will be forced to end its war. In Britain, we have a particular responsibility because of the role of the City of London and the British Overseas Dependences in not merely supporting but creating the Russian regime.

To make this argument, I make some conceptual/theoretical points in relation to: the nature of NATO before and after 1991; the political-economy of Russia since 1991; Russia's nature as an imperialist country; imperialist protectorates; wars between imperialist powers. Since this article is controversial, I have numbered the sections so critics can refer to particular arguments clearly.

### **1. NATO before 1991**

1.1 *NATO was created after the SWW as a capitalist-imperialist project to return the Soviet Union (USSR) and Eastern Europe to capitalism.* It was not defensive because the Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR had no intention and no interest in widening the non-capitalist countries and its sphere of influence beyond Eastern Europe; rather, following Yalta, it sought peaceful coexistence. NATO

succeeded in its aim in 1989/91 with the conversion of the USSR to capitalism. In 1991 NATO therefore lost this historic reason for existence.

1.2 *Another role of NATO was as a US protectorate over Western Europe* (see Peter Gowan's writings). A 'protectorate' is where a militarily-powerful imperialist country dominates other countries (imperialist, colonial) not through invasion but through offering protection from another imperialist power. The aim is to ensure that the dominated countries are integrated into the dominant country's *economic* sphere (inward investment, trade, raw materials), and that the governments of the dominated countries accept and *politically* facilitate this. (This is sometimes known as 'sphere of influence', but this is a vague term.) It is different from colonialism, where the dominated country is much poorer than the dominant country and is economically exploited by it. In 1991 the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact meant that the reason for the US protectorate of Western Europe apparently disappeared. However, the US revived it in a new form - see section 3.2.

## 2. The nature of the post-Soviet oligarchic states

2.1 After 1989 the USSR converted entirely to capitalism at the initiative of the bureaucracy, and with technical help from western 'experts'. At the same time, it split into its constituent countries, which had been republics of the USSR. Elements of the former Stalinist bureaucracy took over ownership of the economic assets. Because this process of privatisation was carried out through the state, the state became central to the allocation of assets between oligarchs. The oligarchs and state personnel further enriched themselves through a system of systematic corruption, 'the parallel state', where people have to pay bribes to state officials to get anything done, and these bribes travel up to the top. This system requires the suppression of democracy. This has resulted in the neoliberal-authoritarian state of Russia, and the other former Soviet republics (Ukraine, Kazakstan, etc). The state, though not itself fascist in a strict sense, makes use of fascist groups to divide the working class (e.g. violence against LGBT people and people of colour).

2.2 A feature of the oligarchic states in the making is violence between groups of oligarchs. Competition for shares of the country's assets proceeds through positions in the state plus violence (assassinations, civil war): in Russia murder of competing oligarchs; recently in Kazakstan jockeying between oligarchs; in Kyrgystan chronic strife. Every Ukrainian government since 1991 has been linked to, and served, a particular group of oligarchs; this includes the present government of Zelenskij which is linked to, among others, Ihor Kolomisky (who in 2016 stole \$5bn from the largest Ukrainian bank and was sanctioned in the US as a result) (see Phillip Inman, *The Observer*, 13/3/22). The oligarchs may draw in sections of the population behind them. Thus the events in Ukraine in 2014 combined a popular uprising against the government of Yanukovych with a conflict between the Russian-speaking or Russia-linked oligarchs represented by Yanukovych and other oligarchs.<sup>1</sup>

2.3 *This Russian state is imperialist in the sense of late 19C European and US imperialism: it exports capital.* The export of capital was a crucial feature of late 19C European and US imperialism. Strong capital accumulation in a country tends to lead to a falling rate of profit, falling rate of investment, and accumulation of savings by firms. This money capital then looks for new profitable lines of investment overseas. After 1991, sectors of the economy other than oil, gas and minerals, including mechanical and electrical engineering, electronics and software writing, declined or collapsed. The accumulated savings of the oligarchs therefore needed outlets abroad. They found these partly by channelling their money into world financial circuits, but also sought investment opportunities in the other former USSR republics.

2.4 *The Russian state, unlike the USSR, is territorially expansionist, for two reasons:-*

- A. The Russian capitalists wish to have a greater area (territory) of economic operation (2.3 above). Russia wishes to have governments in the former republics of the USSR which are politically friendly to Russia, thus allowing Russian capital to operate more easily in them.
- B. Russia's class relations, i.e. the direct political suppression of the working class, are threatened by the example of political democracy in former republics of the USSR (e.g. Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia), and in a weaker way by parliamentary democracy in Eastern Europe.

*After 1991 Russia sought to construct a protectorate over all the former republics of the USSR.* This meant that the countries would be economically integrated with Russia, and that the governments would be politically allied with Russia. But this was much more difficult than for the US to construct a protectorate over Western Europe (before 1991) or over Europe as a whole (after 1991), for the simple reason that *Russia has a far lower GDP and GDP per head than Europe*; the Russian offer is thus much less appealing to the capitalists of the dominated countries of the proposed protectorate than integration with Europe. This is a particular consideration for the higher income countries of the former USSR, notably the Baltic states, Ukraine and Georgia. It is much less of a consideration for the poorer countries of central Asia, which are anyway geographically remote from Europe.

In the Russian project of a protectorate, the central Asian republics were therefore unproblematic. But those in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe (Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia) were in danger of integrating with the EU, and of falling under a US/NATO protectorate. Putin then resorted to two forms of direct coercion, military violence and threat of cutting off its gas supply, thus going beyond the protectorate mode of power.<sup>2</sup> Thus when Chechnya showed signs of political independence from Moscow, Putin invaded, twice, destroying Grozny, and installed a pro-Moscow government. (This also had the domestic advantage of conjuring a 'Moslem' enemy). When Georgia sought to join the European/NATO orbit, Russia invaded and declared the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008.

Before the building of the NordStream1 pipeline, Russian gas flowed to Europe through Ukraine. Under the Moscow-aligned president Yanukovich, Ukraine received gas at a lower price than countries further west. In 2004 Yanukovich was overthrown in the 'Orange revolution' and western-aligned Yushchenko became president, to Putin's displeasure. Moscow demanded a large rise in gas price; in the winter, Russia turned off the gas to the Ukraine. Yushchenko had to agree to a higher gas price, splitting his coalition. In 2010 Yanukovich was re-elected. In 2013 Russia attempted to make an agreement with the US that Ukraine should not join NATO, which the US refused. Yanukovich's spectacularly corrupt reign was brought to an end by the 2014 uprising, bringing to power a government that, once again, sought economic ties with the EU. Putin reacted to this setback by annexation of Crimea and of the Donbas. But the majority of Ukraine remained outside his protectorate.

A different kind of territorial expansion was in Syria. Intervening in the civil war, Russia created the Assad regime as a colony, giving Russia a port on the Mediterranean.

As an aside, note that this territorial expansion by former non-capitalist states has not been limited to Russia. The most significant case is the wars between the states of the former Yugoslavia. Among the former republics of the USSR, Armenia and Azerbaijan have had chronic territorial war.

In these wars, the emerging capitalists, former Stalinist bureaucrats, seek economic gain, and mobilise ethnic hatred, thus subordinating 'their own' working class.

My conclusion is that Russia, like all imperialist countries, is expansionist. Like the US, it has sought to form a protectorate to integrate other countries into its economic sphere. But precisely because the Russian economy is weak and integration with it is a weak offer to the capitalists of other countries, it has resorted to coercion (military, gas diplomacy).

The nature of Russia as territorially expansionist is not understood, or is denied, by most of the western left. This seems to be based on the belief that the territorial behaviour of capitalist Russia is in continuity with the USSR. But the two have different modes of production and consequently completely different territorial dynamics.

### **3. The orientation of Western capitalism to the former USSR and Eastern Europe**

3.1 From the late 1960s, the strategies of the US and the major western European powers towards the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries began to diverge. West Germany adopted an Ostpolitik of detente motivated by investment opportunities and use of Russian gas. After the 1989-91 transition to capitalism and (formal) parliamentary democracy in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the strategies of the US and the major western European countries diverged dramatically, creating strong tensions within NATO.

3.2 We saw in section 1.2 that the US had treated Western Europe as a protectorate against a mythical threat from the USSR. After 1989, the US, through NATO, reinvented this protectorate over the whole of Europe up to the borders with the former USSR, plus the Baltic states. This offered protection from Russia; as we have seen in section 2, the Russian threat was not mythical. The economic motive of the former protectorate had abated; the new protectorate had geo-political motives. The US's global military dominance had been shaken by its defeat in Vietnam; Russia was the only other major nuclear power. From the 1990s the NeoCons proposed 'total spectrum dominance' worldwide. From the 2000s China presented a new economic and military challenge to US imperialism. Accordingly, the US therefore used the threat of Russian expansion to ensure that first Eastern Europe, and subsequently the former USSR republics, would align with US imperialism against both Russia and (then) China.

3.3 In contrast, since 1989 the leading European countries have not been hostile to Russia, and have not threatened it either economically or militarily. On the contrary, building on the Ostpolitik, the main European countries have sought to profit from ever-greater ties with Russia: flows of money capital, commodities, and productive capital. Germany and the East European countries have greatly increased their purchase of Russian gas. Germany has invited Russian capital to invest in ship yards and Opel. British oil firms have invested heavily in Russia. Integration has also come from capital flows the other way: Russian money capital, the result of overaccumulation of money in Russia, has sought to flow in world capitalist circuits. This has mainly been done through the City of London, but also Lithuania-Deutscher Bank, Turkey, and Cyprus. The City of London and successive British governments have therefore played a crucial role in creating the wealth of the oligarchs and thus the Russian expansionist state. The European powers have therefore had no reason to attack Russia either economically or militarily.<sup>3</sup>

The US and Western Europe have thus been on completely different paths in relation to Russia. One instance when this divergence came into the open was when the US wanted Georgia in NATO, but France and Germany vetoed it in order not to antagonise Russia.

3.4 *The capitalists and governments of the East European countries and former USSR republics have not been simply passive pawns in the relations between the US, Western Europe and Russia:* they have had their own interests and have had options for how to proceed, albeit within tight constraints. They have attempted to integrate themselves economically with the EU rather than Russia, for the simple reason that the EU has a far higher GDP and GDP per head. Hence the accession of the former Warsaw pact countries plus the Baltic states to the EU, which had been backed by France, Germany and the UK for their own economic reasons (section 3.3).

At the military-political level, they have sought to join NATO because they are afraid of Russian expansionism (see 2.4). Having weak or non-existent military capacity themselves, they seek military protection where they can get it; NATO is the only possibility. This is the reason that the former USSR republics of the Baltic States (successfully) and Georgia (unsuccessfully) sought to join NATO. Thus the expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe has in part been a result of US aggression towards Russia; but it has also been a choice of the Eastern European countries themselves in the face of the Russian military threat. The Western European powers have not pushed the Eastern countries to join, as the Georgia example shows.

3.5 This history sheds light on the (now much cited) negotiation in 1991 between the western powers and Russia which led to the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. No minutes of this meeting have been made public, but it appears that the west promised Russia that NATO would not be expanded eastwards. If so, NATO has clearly broken its promise. This is in part due to the US's new protectorate and geopolitical aims. But it is also due to East European states seeking to join NATO.

#### **4. The origins of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the left's response**

4.1 This constellation of forces - an expansionist Russian state, the new US protectorate against Russia, the deep integration of Western European capitalism with Eastern Europe and the former USSR - forms the essential background to Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Putin invaded because the existence of a Ukrainian government oriented towards the west conflicted with Russia's project of keeping all the states of the former USSR within its economic and political-military sphere. It was in no way a defence against threats to Russia (see further 4.2). The invasion is therefore a violation of Ukraine's right to self determination, and it has the right to defend itself. The left must therefore say that the Russian state is wholly responsible for this war, and support Ukraine in fighting back. (That the present government of the Ukraine is rightwing and linked to oligarchs is irrelevant to this.) Russia needs to be opposed by whatever means brings an end to the invasion and the withdrawal of Russian forces.

4.2 Some on the left claim that the invasion is a response to threats or aggression against Russia by the west. This argument is false. Before looking at more sober arguments, let us consider two fanciful arguments which are seldom spelt out but which seem to be believed by some on the left:-

(a) *That the US has been using the threat of a military attack on Russia to effect a change of government or 'regime'.* The draws an analogy with the policy of NATO in 1948-91. But the government of Russia is now thoroughly capitalist; western imperialism has no fundamental need or interest in government or regime change in Russia.

(b) *That the US has been intending to launch a military attack on Russia.* Aside from the world nuclear war which would result, the Western European powers have enormous economic

dependence on Russia through imports from Russia, investment in Russia, and Russian export of capital (3.3).

More sober arguments are:-

(i) *That that Putin's wars have been a reaction to 'the West's triumphalism after the fall of the Soviet Union'*. But: (a) There was triumphalism. But it was about the victory of capitalism over 'communism'. It was not in any way anti-Russian. (b) Even if there had been ideological humiliation of Russia, this would not give the Russian state any right to aggression against other states.

(ii) A variant of (i) is that *there is a similarity between Russia's position after 1989 and Germany's position after the First World War*, where the victors imposed economic penalties and hardship on the German people. But the West did not impose economic penalties on the Russian state or people after 1989. The Russian people have certainly greatly suffered economically since 1989; but this was due to the privatisation of the economy, the theft of its assets by the Russian bureaucracy and emerging capitalists, and imposition of neoliberal discipline on the working class.<sup>4</sup>

(iii) *That the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe (and potential expansion into the Caucasus) has threatened the Russian state and therefore the Russian people*. But -

(a) The wish of the US to extend NATO into Eastern Europe aimed to strengthen the US militarily at the global scale against Russia and (later) China. It was not aimed at waging war against Russia. It harmed the Russian state in so far as it removed the Eastern European countries from Russia's economic and political sphere, that is, weakened Russian imperialism. But the weakening of imperialism A by imperialism B does not justify A waging war against B or its allies.

(b) The expansion of NATO has, as we have seen (3.4), also been driven by the wish of the East European states to be protected from Russian aggression. This wish is defensive and does not constitute aggression against Russia.

(iv) *That the Ukraine's wish to join NATO is unreasonable and implicitly aggressive towards Russia*. But -

(a) Ukraine's wish to join NATO is motivated by the wish to be defended militarily against Russia (cf point (iii)(b) above). The previous Russian invasion of Crimea and the Donbas made this wish eminently rational, and the present invasion obviously reinforces that motivation.

(b) This argument implies that Russia has a *right* to maintain a protectorate over the Ukraine (and other former USSR countries). But anti-imperialists do not accept this 'right'.

To be explicit, as long as NATO exists, Ukraine has the right to join it if it wishes. Ukraine may at some point declare its 'neutrality', i.e. that it will not join NATO. But this is a tactical decision, not a matter of principle. It should not be made by the US and Russia (see Varoukafis in 1.1) over the head of the Ukraine.

Taking points (i) to (iv) together, we see that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not a reasonable, justifiable or defensive response to western aggression. Socialists should not be neutral in this war, nor blame both sides.

4.3 STWC and others on the left have demanded the dissolution of NATO *as part of their agitation around the invasion*. The dissolution of NATO is desirable, but it is irrelevant to ending the war. The existence of NATO did not cause Putin's invasion, and its dissolution would not end it. Even if NATO were dissolved, the Eastern European states would still seek help from Western Europe and the US against Russian territorial expansion or attacks. The demand to dissolve NATO is therefore at best a red herring; at worst, it mis-identifies the origin of the war.

Less importantly, and as a question of tactics, this is the worst possible moment for the left to campaign for the dissolution of NATO. The Ukrainian government is seeking military aid from NATO members, and the great majority of the western public will see this as legitimate. In these circumstances, 'dissolve NATO' weakens the credibility of the left with the public.

4.4 The position of neutrality (see the Introduction) rests, at bottom, on an abstract principle: that the war in the Ukraine is a war between imperialist countries, or between two protectorates, and that socialists do not take sides in such wars.<sup>5</sup> But imperialist powers compete with each other in a number of different ways. They may use purely economic means, or offer a protectorate over other countries. But some imperialist countries use unilateral violence against other countries. For other imperialist powers to oppose such invasion may be justified from a socialist perspective. For example, the 1939 German invasion of Poland, as a prelude to the rest of Eastern Europe and the USSR, was unilateral violence. Britain declared war on Germany for that reason. As far as I know, socialists supported Britain in this. *So the problem with the neutrality view is that it ignores the fact that Russia has been in the past, and is now, unilaterally violent, for the reasons discussed in 2.4.*

4.5 Socialists should support the Ukrainian government and people in fighting Russia by what ever means. We should support sending arms as well as economic aid to the Ukraine. We should support economic sanctions which hit the Russian state (for example, freezing its foreign-currency reserves) and the oligarchs, who are the only force that can make Putin pull out of Ukraine. Other economic sanctions, such as not buying Russian gas and other exports, not exporting to Russia, and closing western-owned enterprises in Russia, are more problematic in that they hit, or may hit, the already very low living standards of the working class.

4.6 As everyone on the left has pointed out, the West's stance against the invasion of Ukraine is gross hypocrisy, in that the US, Britain and the other Western powers have carried out innumerable unilateral invasions, some recent (see further 5.3). But this does not mean that socialists disagree with every economic and military action against another imperialist power. We should point out the West's hypocrisy. But right now the priority is the slaughter in Ukraine; and 'my enemy's enemy' is no guide for this.

## **5. The particular responsibilities of the left in Britain**

5.1 Britain is classed by many international organisations as a tax haven. It maintains low rates of corporation tax and capital gains tax, and a multiplicity of ways of offsetting or avoiding those taxes ('the corporate welfare state'). After the SWW, the City of London set up the British Overseas Dependencies (Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Gibraltar, and nine others) as tax havens and secrecy jurisdictions. They have zero corporation tax. The beneficial ownership of companies is secret. These were and still are an integral part of the City of London. This situation is a huge problem for the working class in Britain, since the government is deprived of a major source of tax income which could be spent on public services. The 2019 Labour manifesto accordingly proposed to increase taxes on corporations and the rich by a total of £83bn a year. This was opposed by the

majority of British capital, which accordingly did not support Labour at that election (even though some sections of capital supported other aspects of Labour's programme).

5.2 But the role of Britain as a tax haven is also a major problem for workers throughout the world: the City of London is a laundromat and enabler not only for Russian oligarchs but Third World kleptocrats, oligarchs and mafias in general. It offers a complete package: golden visas for £2m, banking and property secrecy, purchase of luxury property, lawyers for disguising money origins, libel lawyers to suppress critics worldwide, political PR and lobbyists to gain entry to the British elite. This is natural role for the City of London because it was the centre of the British empire for 350 years. It is now the leading world centre for mobile money capital, and one of the top centres for trading in assets (stocks, shares, bonds, derivatives, foreign exchange, commodity futures). Particularly since the 1980s, Britain has also offered low rates of corporation tax. The registration of UK companies is ridiculously easy: no checks are done on where the money comes from or who the owners or directors are. Ditto purchase of buildings in Britain. (In 2018, Teresa May introduced a law enabling seizure of stolen wealth through Unexplained Wealth Orders. So far, there have been four, and none under Johnson.) The British Overseas Dependencies are a major part of the offer to overseas money capital.<sup>6</sup>

The problem is not merely that these kleptocratic regimes are carrying out wars. *It is that oligarchs' wealth derives from theft of state assets and extortion, that is, theft from the people.* Should this wealth lodged in Britain be seized by the British state, and returned to the people? How would that work?

The left in Britain has never had a strategy towards the City of London. It's high time we did. For a minimal start: (1) Companies House should require the proof of beneficial ownership in a public register. (2) Purchase of buildings should require the proof of beneficial ownership rather than a shell company. (3) Immediate closure of the overseas tax havens. This could be done by simply requiring corporation tax to be charged at the same rate as the UK, and company registrations as in 1. (4) All tax returns should be public, as in Sweden. (5) End the golden visas. These are just some minimal issues raised by current sanctions on Russian money.

There is a link of all this to Brexit. Since the early 2000s, France and Germany have sought to increase their tax take from corporation tax. They have attempted to close tax havens, in particular Britain's ODs, and also to force all EU member states to have the same rate of corporation tax, thus raising it in Britain. Parts of the City of London, and the overseas capital flowing through it, saw this as a major threat, and accordingly pushed for Brexit. Low corporation tax and the continuation of the British tax havens are now safe from 'Brussels meddling'.

5.3 Russia. Since 1991, links between Russian and British capital have multiplied. Russian oligarchs park their over-accumulated money capital into London and the Overseas Dependencies. British oil, gas and mining corporations have large investments in Russia, often as joint projects with Russian corporations. Socialists should highlight the essential role of the City of London and successive British governments in creating the contemporary Russia political economy. British governments, parties and politicians have been complicit in this process. Lord Barker, a former Tory energy minister, is chair of EN+, Deripaska's metals conglomerate, and there are many others. The New Labour government and leading Labour politicians are also involved. Blair went to Moscow in 2000 to support Putin's election. Mandelson, at that time EU trade commissioner, was discovered in 2008 on Deripaska's yacht off Corfu discussing lowering tariffs on his aluminium imports (also present: David Cameron). Since leaving office, Blair and Mandelson have been



political enablers for the politicians and oligarchs of the former USSR. We should demand that Labour expel Blair and Mandelson and other Labour figures involved in this shit.

5.4 Saudi Arabia. Britain set up the Saudi and Gulf dictatorships after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire. London is the main place where the Saudi and Gulf State dictators (royal families) stash their billions. The Saudis have been carrying out a genocidal war in Yemen, for the same reasons as Putin's war in the Ukraine: the Houthis aligned themselves with a competing capitalist block, Iran. The British government, far from opposing this war, has been enabling it through the sales of arms by supplying British military technicians to organise the Saudi airforce's bombing. The left should highlight this gross hypocrisy, and call for an end to British involvement in the Yemen genocide. If the government were consistent in opposing invasions, it would freeze the assets of the Saudis in Britain!

## Notes

1. Violence between capitalists is a feature of capitalist states in the making. Examples are (1) Western Europe from the 16C to the 18C: Italian city states' perpetual internal battles; the English state under the Tudors and Stewarts; even the English-Scottish state up until 1745. (2) Innumerable Third World countries since decolonisation. The emerging capitalists typically draw in different sections of the population on the basis of ethnicity/tribe.
2. There may be a tendency for weaker imperialisms to resort to war with other imperialisms more readily than do strong imperialisms. For example, Germany launched wars of conquest in 1870, 1914 and 1939 partly because it was *weaker* than British and French imperialisms in that it lacked colonies in the global south.
3. This difference between the US and Western Europe in relation to Russia is now part of a wider manoeuvring in relation to China. China is now the EU's largest trading partner, and the EU wishes to deepen this relationship. The US has a more ambivalent relationship to China: US TNCs profit massively from Chinese workers, but the US confronts China militarily in the Pacific (see Bellow, Socialist Review 2021). Hence the US-German row about the use of Hauwei 5G technology. On this, British capital is split: the traditional parts of the City of London plus the main British-headquartered industrial and commercial corporations orient to Russia and China; Alternative Investment Finance and some high tech sectors, represented by the ERG, orient to the US; the latter have been strengthened by Brexit.
4. A variant of this argument: Hitler used this economic punishment in his rise to power, and Putin is said to have done the same thing; thus the west has partial responsibility for the rise of Putin.
5. This was the view of Anti-Capitalist Resistance in its first statement on Ukraine. Since then ACR has apparently changed its opinion on this question.
6. A recent example: The Ukrainian oligarch Dmitry Firtash, who made billions selling Russian gas to the Ukraine, around 2010 moved all his many companies to the British Virgin Islands. See Oliver Bullough, 'How Britain welcomed the oligarchs, no questions asked', *The Guardian*, 8 March 2022.