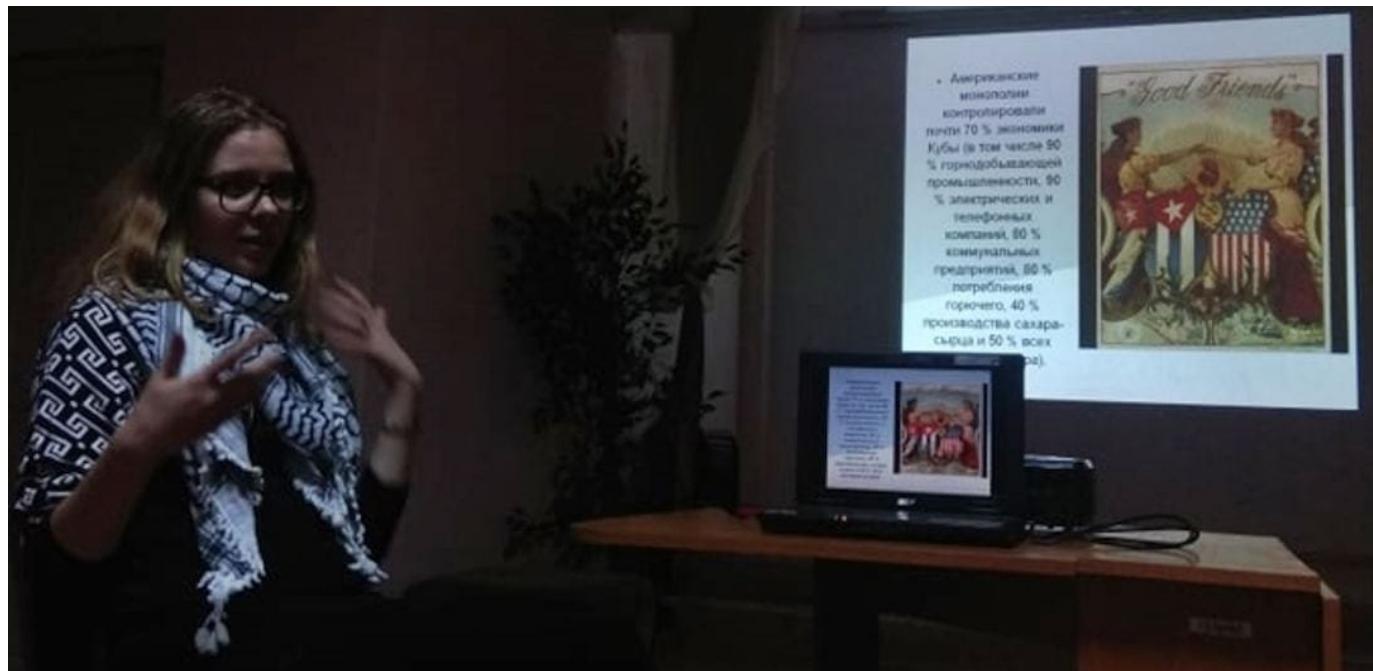


Donetsk women's leader: 'Capitalism brings destruction and death'

written by Greg Butterfield
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Katya A. leads a discussion of the Aurora Women's Club in Donetsk.

In February 2014, a U.S.-backed coup overthrew the elected government of Ukraine

and installed a far-right regime representing Western imperialist interests, local oligarchs and neo-Nazis. The new government launched a war against the rebellious Donbass mining region, which has cost at least 13,000 lives so far. People in Donbass declared independence, creating the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR).

I met university student Katya A. in Donetsk in May 2016. Then, she had recently joined a circle of left-wing activists, which included some experienced organizers forced to emigrate from western Ukraine. Today, Katya is not only pursuing her master's degree, but has become a dynamic women's and communist youth leader. She has also represented the Donbass struggle abroad. She spoke with Struggle-La Lucha about her experiences.

Struggle-La Lucha: The Ukrainian regime's war against Donbass started nearly five years ago. Did you live in Donetsk at that time? What do you most remember about the early days of the war?

Katya A.: At the time of those events I lived in Donetsk, like I have for most of my life. I only left for two months in the summer of 2014. When I returned home in September, the war was in full swing.

Then, I was just starting to become interested in Marxism. I was a loner and didn't participate in any movements. I don't like to remember those days. I'm often ashamed that I took a detached position then. On the other hand, I didn't have good teachers and mentors.

SLL: How have the past five years shaped your political views and activities?

KA: Now, I'm a member of the [Aurora Women's Club](#). Our main activity is education. We study women's issues from a Marxist standpoint, watch films, discuss books, hold popular science lectures and so on. Another important aspect of our activity is a

philosophical circle where we study political economy using original sources and the Marxist classics.

More recently, I've become a member of the Komsomol, a communist youth organization. We have a lot of plans. I see that many young people are actively interested in leftist ideas. I'm very pleased that my peers want to study Marxism, to understand the essence of things under capitalism.

War is a hard experience both in terms of shaping political views and shaping character. But I clearly understand that capitalism brings with it destruction and death. We must be strong and not give up in our struggle.

SLL: How would you compare the situation of workers in Donetsk with what existed before 2014, especially for women? What about the economic blockade imposed by Ukraine and the West?

KA: The economic blockade and war have had a negative impact on the working class, particularly women. We are all potential migrants now. Many people are left without work.

Workers from Donbass are frequently deceived. They are mercilessly exploited. Often, they are forced to work illegally. Some have become freelancers or work remotely, but in this case there are problems with cashing electronic payments. To do this, you must either pay big interest here, or go to the nearest Russian cities — Rostov or Taganrog.

Nevertheless, unlike Ukraine and the cities and villages of the DPR occupied by Ukrainian troops, we have relatively cheap public utilities. Most students receive scholarships. Although they are small, it helps with our difficult conditions.

SLL: What similarities do you see between what happened in Ukraine five years ago and the current situation in Venezuela and other Latin American countries targeted

by the U.S.?

KA: It's obvious to me that all these events are imperialistic games. By the way, we often forget that imperialism is not only a direct military invasion. It has long acted in other ways, for example by imposing economic dependence on some countries, huge debts, subordinating their industry. Vladimir Lenin wrote beautifully about this in his book [Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism.](#)

Our struggle is a struggle against imperialism, which five years ago aimed its predatory view at our country. Naturally, in Latin America the situation has its own specifics, but these are all phenomena of the same order.

We are in solidarity with the people of Venezuela, closely watching the events taking place there. Unfortunately, many leftists, instead of expressing solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution, are beginning to criticize the system that has developed there. In my opinion, at this moment such criticism only serves the imperialists.

First of all, Venezuela needs to defend its independence. Ukraine failed to do this. Although this country used to be largely dependent, now it can hardly be considered an independent political entity at all. Look what happened to what was once the richest Soviet republic! Ukraine has become the poorest European country. It is waging war against the people of Donbass, while hypocritically asserting that this is an integral part of the Ukrainian state.

It feels like a large-scale and inhuman experiment was conducted on Ukrainians. People swallow propaganda garbage, Donbass-phobia and social racism flourishes, while the rightists feel extremely comfortable. These are the consequences of this combination of imperialism, neoliberalism and stupefying nationalism.

SLL: Recently, it was reported that white supremacists from California were trained by an armed fascist battalion in Ukraine. How do you assess the connection between

the ultraright takeover and the spread of neofascist movements in the West?

KA: The growth of neofascist movements in the West began before Maidan. Naturally, this is a process, not a single event. Right-wing and conservative regimes have been established in many European countries. You don't need to go far for an example: look at Ukraine's neighbor Hungary, where Viktor Orbán rules.

Obviously, the world is experiencing a period of reaction. We see how country after country is falling under the control of right-wing or even neofascist rulers. And surprisingly, the right-wingers get along well with each other.

In Ukraine, as I said, the ultraright feel great. They can smash Roma settlements with impunity. They attack left-wing activists, people from the LGBTQ community, feminists and others who somehow do not conform to their notions of a "normal person." Then, there are the attacks against people who take a firm anti-war position, or the terror that they carry out in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Lugansk.

By the way, the Ukrainian fascist battalions don't just train their foreign "friends," but are also actively engaged in raising children in this "patriotic" spirit.

This war attracted many rightists who began to fight on the side of Ukraine. There are even Russian fascists on their side. The far right understand that they have a common cause. And for them, the war in Ukraine is also an excellent training ground, no matter how scary it sounds.

SLL: How can workers and leftists in the United States help the struggle of people in Donbass?

KA: People should know about what is going on in the Donbass. I often encounter foreigners who have no idea about our struggle — they've never even heard about what is happening here.

I believe that workers and leftists in the United States can help us by breaking through this information blockade. Donbass has a lot in common with Palestine. But while the whole left knows about Palestine, few people speak about Donbass.

We are very grateful to those comrades from the U.S. who do not forget about us and constantly raise the agenda of Donbass.

Read [*Aurora Women's Club's 11-point program*](#), issued on International Women's Day.

