

‘Stop War Lies’ protest gets positive response in New York

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SLL photo: Sharon Black

On April 2, about two dozen activists gathered in New York City's Herald Square shopping district for an action called "Stop the War Lies." The protesters raised signs declaring "No war on Russia and Donbass," "Stop supporting neo-nazis in Ukraine," "Money for jobs and schools - not NATO," and "Roll back gas and food prices."

Given the overwhelming war propaganda broadcast by the White House, Congress and the media demonizing Russia's intervention in Ukraine to aid the Donbass republics, no one was quite sure how it would be received.

The action was called by Solidarity with Donbass & Antifascists in Ukraine, the Socialist Unity Party and Struggle-La Lucha newspaper. Several anti-war organizations were invited, but declined to participate. However, individual activists who heard about the protest came.

Notably, none of these groups have called street actions in New York or other major cities since the Russian Federation recognized the independent Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics on Feb. 21 and the U.S.-NATO war propaganda reached full-throttle.

Over a mobile sound system, protesters chanted: "Stop the U.S. war machine from Ukraine to the Philippines" and "Hands off Russia, hands off Donbass, bring the troops home!" They distributed hundreds of fact-sheets and newspapers to passersby.

The reception was, significantly, overwhelmingly positive. People were eager to hear a different perspective from the war propaganda that has been drummed into their ears for months.

Many were openly skeptical of the U.S. government's motivations for drawing the

country into confrontation with Russia. Some even took up seats in the plaza where the event was held, including an Iraq War veteran with first-hand knowledge of U.S. war crimes.

Seeing Black and white people standing together to denounce the U.S. war lies encouraged many workers of color to stop and listen to the speakers and take informational leaflets.

Over the course of the nearly two-hour street meeting, several passersby, including parents with children, stopped to listen, hold signs and take selfies with the anti-war demands.

Get Pentagon off our backs!

Andre Powell of the Socialist Unity Party emceed the speak-out.

“This weekend marks the anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968,” Powell reminded the crowd. “Just one year before his death, Dr. King spoke out strongly against the Vietnam War. We have chosen this weekend to honor his memory and his stance against wars around the world, to raise our voices in support of the people of the Donbass region – the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics.

“U.S. corporations and banks don’t have the right to decide that the people of the Donbass region should not be independent of Ukraine. But since the Donbass region made its declaration, they have been continuously bombed by Ukraine. And you heard not one damn word in the U.S. media. None of them mention the eight years of killing in the Donbass region by the neo-Nazi Ukrainian government.

“Now they’re crying crocodile tears because Russia intervened at the request of the Donbass people for help. Russia did not invade; it intervened to protect the Donbass people who were being slaughtered by the Ukrainian government.”

“The U.S. has one of the highest death rates in the world from COVID-19,” [said Lallan Schoenstein](#) of Women in Struggle/Mujeres en Lucha. “That is no natural disaster. It is because the U.S., with all its wealth, does not provide for a national health care system. Now the U.S. Congress has withdrawn funds for fighting COVID in order to spend another \$13.6 billion for the U.S. war machine in the Ukraine.

“Will the U.S./NATO military funds bring peace to Ukraine — and improve our lives as well? No! It is dragging the Ukrainians into catastrophe and threatening the well-being of the entire world.”

Struggle-La Lucha reporter Bill Does explained: “The media and the corporate flunkies on Capitol Hill and the White House want you to believe that one day Russia just up and attacked Ukraine. They don’t tell you that this war has been going on for eight years, since a CIA-led U.S.-backed coup in Ukraine in 2014. The Kiev regime has been waging war against its own people, who don’t want to live under NATO, who want to live in peace with their neighbors.

“For the past 30 years we have watched the U.S. military destroy country after country – Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Yugoslavia – for no other reason than to enrich giant corporations, particularly the oil monopolies that want to control the world’s energy reserves. And now we’re supposed to believe the U.S. government is pouring weapons, money and advisers into Ukraine to support democracy.”

‘Can you afford a war for Big Oil?’

Sharon Black of the Unemployed Workers Union saluted the victory of the pro-union vote by Amazon workers in Staten Island. She declared: “It’s the billionaires like Jeff Bezos and the military industry that are benefitting from the war. When you go to your food market, can you afford food right now? Can you afford a war that’s being waged on behalf of the bankers and the oil industry? I don’t think so!

“This is part of a series of educational actions around the country to ‘Stop the War Lies.’ Because that’s what’s happening. When we go to fill our gas tanks and we can’t afford it, they want us to blame it on Russia instead of the oil oligarchs who live right here in this country. It’s their greed that’s responsible. No one has a gun to their head to raise prices. It’s capitalist greed, plain and simple. They created this disruption so they can increase their profits.

“As much as it hurts us here, it’s the people of eastern Ukraine, of the Donbass region, that are paying with their lives.”

Other speakers included Greg Butterfield, Solidarity with Donbass & Antifascists in Ukraine;

Lee Patterson, Peoples Power Assembly; Heather Cottin, longtime teacher and activist; Andrew Mayton, Youth Against War & Racism; Johnnie Stevens, Parents to Improve School Transportation (PIST); and Julius Kroll, one of a group of visiting University of Pennsylvania students who came upon the protest by chance.

Organizer Greg Butterfield told SLL, “Some groups have abandoned their professed anti-imperialist principles, condemning Russia and belittling the heroic resistance of the Donbass people, downplaying the role of neo-Nazi and white supremacist forces in the Ukrainian state, and giving backhanded support to the U.S.-NATO war drive. Others, while taking a better position on paper, are keeping their heads down, confining their opposition to statements and webinars.

“For us, the most important thing is to reach the working class and oppressed communities. We want to see what our class is feeling, and figure out the best ways to reach them with an anti-war message. That means getting out into the streets even at the risk of being confronted by right-wingers or even hostility from confused workers.

“Hopefully, the success of this initiative and the positive response will help the rank-and-file of the larger anti-war organizations push their leaders to be less timid and encourage more street actions. Visible, vocal opposition to the U.S. war drive, boldly exposing the lies it’s based on, is what is most urgently needed right now.”

