

## In countercurrent: the Popular Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk

### Who would say!

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**Wisuschil - Media & Law** - In the first years of the XXI century, when, at least at the beginning of the century, there is a neoliberal predominance, allied in several countries with a resurgence of the forces of the extreme right, two popular republics emerged! Who would say!

This occurs in an important mining and industrial region, known as the Donbass Region (the Don river basin, in fact a subbasin, called the Donest River, a tributary of the Don River), in eastern Ukraine, in the oblasti\* (administrative and political regions, equivalent to members states of a federation) of Donetsk and Lugansk.

Donbass's independence emerged as a reaction to the oligarchic and neo-Nazi coup in Kiev and to a large extent encouraged by the local cells of the Communist Party and the Progressive Socialist Party, both of Ukraine, defeating the Party of the Region that supported the coup perpetrated in Kiev.

A broad spectrum of socio-political forces was formed, united by the common rejection of neo-nazism, bureaucratization, rigorous centralism, corruption and oligarchic dictatorship. This spectrum is made up of socialists, nationalists, communists, progressives and others.

On April 7, 2014, it was installed the People's Council, proclaimed as the highest authority of the People's Republic of Donetsk.

The referendum, movements and measures.

Despite increased political, media and military pressures and provocations, a referendum was held in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, which asked the question: "Do you support the RPD / RPL Independence Act?"

In Donetsk, 89.7% of voters said yes, while in Lugansk the "yes" reached 96.2% of voters.

The properties of the oligarchs were nationalized and created a tax incident on Ukrainian citizens residing in the region and their assets that is intended to finance the popular militias fighting the forces of Kiev, backed by imperialism.

In spite of the strong influence of socialist ideas and the taking of socializing measures, in Donetsk two great political movements formed, true fronts: the Social Movement of the Republic of Donetsk, that was founded by Andrey Purgin that at the moment, is led by the leader of the RPD, Alexander Zakharchenko, and by the Chairman of the People's Council, Denis Pushilin. The other movement, or front, is the Free Donbass.

The programmatic differences between the two movements represented in the People's Council of the RPD are minimal. Importantly, the only officially registered party in the RPD is the Communist Party of the People's Republic of Donetsk.

Also in Luhansk were formed two fronts: the Movement for Peace in Lugansk, led by Igor Plotnitsky, member of parliament, and the Economic Union of Lugansk. According to their leaders, especially the Movement for Peace, these parties have as objectives to fight against fascism and to be part of Russia. At the moment, political and social parties and movements are united by virtue of war.

But in the face of these political forces and movements, a question must be asked: once independence has been affirmed, when the war in which they find themselves, where will the socioeconomic system of Donbass go? For a national capitalism? For the return to oligarchic capitalism, though deeply reformed? Or for socialism?

The answer depends, to a large extent, on international solidarity with the popular republics of Donetsk and Lugansk.

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The progressives of that region and the broad popular support they hold can not be abandoned, either by indifference or by a posture of waiting for events. It is necessary to create forms of support, right now, and one of them, for example, can be real humanitarian aid. Another example is the necessary solidarity with the Donbass fighters imprisoned by the neo-nazi regime in Ukraine.

## Donbass and Russia

It is true that the Donbass separatists are in favor of a rapprochement with Russia. When the popular republics united in a country in 2014, it became known as *Novorossia* (transliteration - Novorassia) which means New Russia.

But why do they want to get closer to Russia? There are undeniable cultural and historical reasons. Just remember that Russia is born, as a country, in Kiev, today the capital of Ukraine, which reveals the centuries-long bonds of union between Ukraine and Russia. In addition, there is an important political and economic issue. Ukraine was in a dilemma: joining the European Union to receive funding, loans, or to do so with Russia. The then president Viktor Yanukovich preferred to request a loan to Russia and not to join the European Union.

Meanwhile, mainly in Kiev, there was the Maidan movement, or Euromaidan, favorable to Ukraine's entry into the EU, which eventually overthrown Yanukovich. When the new government in Ukraine was consolidated, the separatist movement of Donbass began because they were and are against the austerity policies and restrictions of rights of the European Union and therefore, fundamentally prefer to approach the Eurasian Customs Union under the hegemony of Russia.

Columbia University Political Science professor Elise Giuliano wrote a text on the subject entitled "The Origins of Separatism: Popular Grievances in Donetsk and Luhansk". The text can be found at

<http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/origins-separatism-popular-grievances-donetsk-and-luhansk>

At one point in the text she says:

"I identify a range of reasons why ordinary people began to support separatism by examining grievances in Donetsk and Luhansk in late 2013 and early 2014. The analysis goes beyond a one-dimensional understanding of separatists as pro-Russian, motivated solely by an enduring orientation to Russia that has not changed over time, whether due to ethnic or linguistic identity, or political loyalty."

And later, talking about the themes that will develop, says:

"Yet for others in the Donbas, support for separatism was not primarily about joining Russia but was motivated by various forms of material interest, or by a sense of betrayal by Kyiv and the rest of the country inspired by the Euromaidan events. In terms of material interest, I examine two kinds of grievances:

- 1) claims of discriminatory redistribution within Ukraine; and
- 2) perceptions of the negative effect of potential EU membership on economic welfare, due to austerity policies or the foregoing of trade with Russia and the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) (signatory's italics).

And dr. Edward Popov states: "The proclamation of the people's republics of Donbass was a logical reaction to the dismantling of Ukrainian statehood as it had been formed in the framework of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic."

## Western Reaction

Donbass's "connection" with Russia, plus the reintegration of the Crimea, justified in the West a huge American and NATO military buildup along Russia's borders.

NATO forces have settled in the Baltic states, military exercises have been or are still being held in the Black Sea, Poland is being prepared for war with Russia and the possible use of nuclear weapons is almost routine in relation to deterring alleged Russian aggression.

Донецька РДА, (soviet, council)

The main industries in the Donbass region were nationalized. After that, war began and socialism (which is intended to be created) can only be built in peace. The historical example of the USSR teaches us that during the civil war and against the foreign forces that surrounded the then incipient USSR there was "war communism", that is, a veritable confiscation of the production that practically did not exist and, after the war, Lenin established the NEP to create an initial capital and develop the economy to build socialism.

The People's Council is the highest authority of the Region and council in Russian, as it is known, is "soviet" (Донецька РДА,) as well as in Ukrainian.

The parliament of the RPD is the People's Council (or People's Council) which was chaired by Boris Litvinov who is, or was, the SG of the Communist Party of the People's Republic of Donetsk, successor of the Communist Party of Ukraine, in the region, maintaining the same program of the CP of Ukraine. The RPD CP is part of a political front entitled "Republic of Donetsk" and supported the election of the current Prime Minister of the RPD, Alexander Zakharchenko.

The People's Council has 100 seats and by the result of the 2014 elections, the front "Republic of Donetsk" made 68 seats, 11 of them from the RPD PC and the other "Free Donbass" front made 32 seats, 19 of them belong to the "New Russia Party".

The Socialist Progressive Party of Ukraine, a dissident party of the Ukrainian Socialist Party led by Nataliya Vitrenko who was a candidate for the presidency of Ukraine in 1996, did not participate as a party in the 2014 elections but may have representatives elected by the "Republic of Donetsk".

The fight

The new people's republics are succeeding despite the difficult conditions in the fight against Ukrainian neo-nazism.

It is worth remembering that in the 20th century the first country to fight with Nazi-fascism was the Republic of Spain, and after the end of the Spanish Civil War, with the lamentable victory of Franco in 1939, the Second World War began.

The Popular Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk have united and formed a new country which is the first in this century to fight with guns against neo-Nazism.

From a military and geopolitical point of view, it is important for New Russia to take the port city of Mariupol which would give it a maritime communication to the west with Russia and would allow it, by the Sea of Azov, to reach the Black Sea, Marmara, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and then head east to the Atlantic Ocean, or heading south through the Suez Canal to reach the Arabian Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Although Mariupol is part of the Donetsk region, after several battles, it still remains in the military hands of Ukraine.

The internal ideological struggle of New Russia should not be intense due to the war, but it will certainly escalate at the end of it.

Putin's Russia is the main international support for New Russia, but supporters, sympathizers of socialism can not forget that Russia is capitalist, despite the deep inter-imperialist struggle, and perhaps will not support the construction of socialism in Donbass. That is why the international solidarity of workers and progressives is necessary for the working class and progressives of New Russia.

In today's world, some regions, such as the Middle East, the Korean peninsula, as well as Donbass, can turn into foppings of a new world war.

Support for Donbass means today to fight for peace and support for progressives in New Russia means the struggle for socialism.

Recently the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, passed a law to reintegrate the territory of Donbass into Ukraine, authorizing

President Poroshenko to use the Ukrainian military without a formal declaration of war to retake the territory of Donbass. At the same time, there is a large shipment of US weapons to Ukraine.

All this runs counter to the Minsk Accords and points to an inevitable resurgence of the struggle between Ukraine and Donbass, and may directly involve Russia in military events, after the exhaustion of diplomatic means, which will lead NATO to support Ukraine and thus certainly, we would be facing a third and, perhaps, last, world war. This possible resurgence of the war is expected to occur in the spring of the region which is facing a harsh winter, making military maneuvers difficult. Or it may take place in March 2018, when presidential elections are planned in Russia, creating the difficulties inherent in the resurgence of the war, but also aiming to demoralize Putin's policy towards New Russia and thus influence the results of that election.

Donbass's separation from Ukraine and the imperialist measures taken from this event demonstrate not only the unrest of imperialism in relation to New Russia's independence, but the profoundly unequal treatment of the same or similar situations.

Two weights, two measures

It is very ironic, but not surprising, that imperialism uses different rules and measures in the case of the conflict between Ukraine and New Russia, of those used in other countries and situations, generating, to say the least, legal and political insecurity in international law.

It should be noted that, for example, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and all other Yugoslav republics were then allowed, encouraged and helped to leave Yugoslavia.

Bosnia became a federal state (actually in two separate states in all, except in the name!).

Kosovo was helped to leave Serbia after a long war and Czechoslovakia was divided peacefully in Catalonia has its own language and a great autonomy in Spain, the province of Quebec has the same situation in Canada and Scotland has a great autonomy within Great Britain.

In Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, the West, that is to say, imperialism, did not even follow any rule, they only created some false accusations, scandalous lies, to meet their domain goals! Two countries.

Any of those arrangements could have been applied to New Russia in relation to Ukraine. But no, in this case, imperialism does not welcome anything but a total surrender of New Russia. Because?

Some say that New Russia is unacceptable, definitively separated from Ukraine, now neo-Nazi, because this would strengthen Russia and imbalance the imperialist power in the region.

This answer is certainly true, but I personally prefer to believe and respond to this disturbing question, saying that Donetsk and Lugansk, exercising the right of self-determination of peoples, declared themselves independent and became popular republics, taking an initial but significant step, towards socialism and with it, definitely, imperialism can not agree. Then, on the imperialist side, we will have a resurgence of war and for the victory of the progressive side we must fight for peace and make international solidarity with New Russia.

(\*Plural in Russian and Ukrainian, from oblast, (in Cyrillic Област, Обласť meaning region, province)

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