

25 Marta 2024

OPEN LETTER TO MATT CARTHY T.D.

UKRAINE AND SINN FÉIN

We write to you about a recent item in the international bulletin of the party (copy attached).

In this, Sinn Féin rightly reiterates its opposition to and condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine which was attempted on the 24th of February 2022. This is in accord with a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly which was overwhelmingly passed deprecating the event in question. As we know, the invasion did not succeed in the way that Putin envisioned and his troops are now entrenched only in parts of eastern and southern Ukraine.

However, it surely behoves the only seriously left-wing party in Ireland to offer a thorough and progressive analysis of the crisis which came about in Ukraine and currently persists.

The fact is that, when Michail Gorbachev offered to withdraw Soviet troops from Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the Eighties, he was given well-documented assurances by NATO that it would not expand into those areas. Nonetheless, subsequently, in the weak Yeltsin years and immediately after, NATO did so expand, up to the boundary with the Russian Federation and its adjunct state Belarus. That was so in respect of the Baltic states and Poland, leaving only Ukraine as the break in such a confrontation extending to the Black Sea.

Apart from that, there is the question of why NATO continued to exist in any form after the end of the Cold War and the disbandment of its counterpart in the shape of the Warsaw Pact. Insofar as it nonetheless did, it has been said that the post-Soviet states of central and eastern Europe had a right to join NATO if they wished. That they had a right to apply is true, but it does not follow that they had a right to be accepted into membership, if that was deemed to be unwise by NATO.

The alternative would have been to create a *cordon sanitaire* from the Baltic to the Black Sea along the lines of Finland, as it then was, involving nationally armed neutrality in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. Had that been done, it is unlikely that Putin would have felt impelled to embark upon the operation which he commenced in February 2022. In saying this, it has to be made abundantly clear that one is not implying that he had the right to act as he did on the latter date in the absence of the buffer zone which could have been created. To attribute a position of justifying his action to those critiquing NATO's post-Soviet behaviour is simply a non sequitur and an effort at distorting the significance of a realistic analysis of recent historical events and the possible alternative outcomes.

The early days of the Russian invasion showed heroic resistance on the part of Ukrainian nationalists. But, for NATO, the position rapidly moved on to assume a much deeper import. It was not long after the invasion, that the US Secretary of Defense said that the aim of the conflict should also be to weaken Russia rather than just protect and defend Ukrainian nationality and freedom. It quickly became evident that NATO was prepared to conduct a proxy war in Ukraine by supplying weapons to its army so that it could fight to the last Ukrainian. A number of US politicians were quite frank about the advantage of being able to militarily engage with Russia without losing a single American soldier. Some analysts in Washington also opined that, acting in Ukraine as they were doing, would send a useful signal to China that it ought not to contemplate moving against Taiwan, as otherwise it would encounter a position similar to that which Russia was experiencing in Ukraine.

In the first Quarter of 2022, Ukraine and Russia engaged in several rounds of peace talks, most significantly and latterly in Istanbul towards the end of March. It was obvious that an agreement was near on the basis of Ukrainian neutrality and recognition of the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine along with extended negotiations on their administrative future. However, Boris Johnston was despatched to Ukraine to warn against peace being concluded which would have thwarted NATO's plans. Unfortunately, Zelensky acquiesced and, from that point, effectively became, in large part, an agent of Western designs as well as resisting Russia.

It should be noted that, in the buildup to the crisis, there were internal dimensions to the conflict in Ukraine which helped bring it about. The Kyiv regime has been and still is largely hostile to the ethnic rights of the Russian-

speaking population and has discriminated against it in various ways by seeking to suppress its language and culture and to 'ukrainize' the areas concerned. While Putin exaggerates the far right elements at work in Ukraine, they do exist and exert notable influences on the regime. For example, the Azov Battalion, recorded in Wikipedia and elsewhere as frankly fascistic, is now incorporated in the Ukrainian armed forces. It is this state of affairs which originally led to the establishment of the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics and to suggest that these were just the invention of Putin, while he may have come to support them, is to deny the reality on the ground. Otherwise, Ukraine is far from being a fully democratic State and free from corruption. It often suppresses internal opposition on the pretext of maintaining security against Russia and shows no sign of allowing further democratic elections.

As of now, a realistic and progressive stance on the Ukrainian crisis would be to call for a United Nations presence in eastern and southern Ukraine and the five provinces in contention there so that plebiscites could be held offering the peoples in those areas three options to choose from, viz. reincorporation in Ukraine, agreed incorporation in the Russian Federation, or independence. It is not impossible that Putin would agree to this on the calculation that the population concerned would not wish to be reincorporated in Ukraine and, if they were reluctant to be formally incorporated under his obnoxious regime, they would at least vote for independence which would also entail neutrality.

Apart from that, it is apparent that a very grave situation could be building up in Europe generally. There is increased talk of a full-blown military confrontation between NATO and Russia. This arises because NATO seemingly estimates that it could be successful in a conventional engagement with Russia, where neither side, whatever about the rhetoric, would dare to use nuclear weapons because of the continuing prospect of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction). You may be sure that if we stagger towards such a scenario, Ireland would not be immune from it if Russia continues to classify us, as it currently does, as a hostile state crucially located in the middle of the NATO sphere of north Atlantic operations. There are unlikely to be Russian landing craft off the west coast, but we should not be surprised if we create for ourselves a position where we could become the target for missile strikes that could even be launched from Atlantic submarines (e.g. at Shannon and elsewhere). Any progressive political party in Ireland should be endeavouring

not to place us in a context in which the security and welfare of our people and nation are thus placed at severe risk.

In the item in the Sinn Féin international bulletin about Ukraine, the absence of any position on NATO's role in helping to bring the current situation about and how it is utilising it for a wider and reactionary strategic purpose other than the defence of Ukraine is to be regretted. Moreover, there is no advertence to the ethnic rights of the Russian population of Ukraine or any suggestion of steps which would lead to their recognition and accommodation. This is particularly unfortunate in the case of a party such as Sinn Féin which essentially stands generally for national and cultural rights. The impression conveyed by the item, no matter how unintentionally, is that Sinn Féin is supporting not only Ukraine, including as it does significant far right elements therein, but NATO to the hilt in its actions in that country. And, as pointed out, our own national security could therefore be ultimately placed in jeopardy as a result.

It is to be hoped that this whole matter will be revisited by the leadership of Sinn Féin in order to consider what an all-round progressive stance should in fact be on the Ukrainian crisis and what is best in upholding the integrity and safety of the Irish nation.

Two years on – Ireland remains steadfast in support of Ukraine

Sinn Féin spokesperson on Foreign Affairs & Defence, **Matt Carthy TD** has said that two years on from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ireland continues to be committed 'in our support of the people of Ukraine, adherence to international law, and to peace across Europe and the globe':



"Two years ago, Vladimir Putin's Russia launched a brutal and criminal war on its peaceful neighbour, Ukraine.

"For Irish people we are clear whose side we are on.

"We are clear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a blatant breach of international law.

"It is a full-scale aggression which has been defined by war crimes committed by the Russian military against innocent people.

"Sinn Féin supports the utilisation of all diplomatic, economic and financial sanctions against Russia in response to these breaches of international law.

"I welcome the constructive approach of the Irish government at a European level in their continued support for Ukraine.

"That approach is one for which they have Sinn Féin's total support.

"Our unified message to Vladimir Putin must remain clear:

- Russia must immediately withdraw from Ukraine;
- Putin must end his war and end the bloodshed.

"As a neutral country that is consistent in our demand for adherence to international law, whether it is Russia or Israel or anyone else that is in breach, our message today is that Ireland will stand with Ukraine through all the horror.

"We hope and pray that the people of Ukraine win out.

"The actions of Russia should remind the world of a lesson that Ireland has long learned.

"That is that the damaging and



Left to right: Mary Lou McDonald TD, Ukrainian Ambassador G. Larysa & Matt Carthy TD



Mary Lou McDonald TD, Dublin

divisive legacy wrought by colonisation, occupation and the denial of self-determination must end.

"We in Ireland know that imperialist

ventures and colonial aggression have no place in a peaceful world, a world of rights, justice and equality.

"Two years on we repeat that a withdrawal of the Russian military must happen and we must all come together to build a pathway and a plan for peace.

"As we mark two years since Russia's brutal war against Ukraine commenced, I hope that we won't have to do so again next year.

"But, if we must then we will remain as committed in our support of the people of Ukraine, to our adherence to international law, and to peace across Europe and the world as we did in the hours, days and weeks immediately after that illegal invasion."