

LESSONS FOR ANARCHISTS ABOUT THE UKRAINE WAR FROM PAST REVOLUTIONS

BY WAYNE PRICE



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★ What Anarchists Can Learn from the Spanish Revolution & the Vietnam War

Anarchists can learn important lessons in relation to the Ukraine-Russia war by looking at the Spanish revolution of the thirties and the movement against the Vietnam-US war of the sixties.

The Ukraine-Russia war is shaking the world. Dealing with it, anarchists and other far-left radicals can learn much from contrasting it to previous conflicts. I chose to contrast it to two previous wars, the Spanish revolution (because of its importance in anarchist history) and the Vietnam-U.S. war (because I participated in the movement against the war).

Revolutionaries study revolutions. For example, the anarchist Peter Kropotkin wrote a history of the French Revolution. Yet I have seen little discussion of the present-day Ukrainian-Russian war which relates it to past revolutionary wars. (For the purpose of this essay, I am lumping together revolutions, civil wars, and wars of national liberation.)

The Ukrainian conflict is not an internal revolution or civil war—it is a war of national liberation, of an oppressed people against an imperialist invasion. But revolutionary anarchists and other anti-authoritarian radicals need a strategy to deal with it. They need to relate their activities in the war to their goal of an international revolution of the working class and all oppressed, winning a world of freedom, self-determination, and cooperation. This is a matter of general strategy, program and principles, not of immediate tactics and slogans. Those depend on the specific time and place and only Ukrainians can determine them. Yet general strategies, as developed in reaction to past revolutions, may be relevant to today's conflicts.

★ The Spanish Revolution

Trotskyists focus on the Russian Revolution, Maoists on the Chinese Revolution, and anarchists on the Spanish revolution (1936—1939)—also called the Spanish civil war. Not that anarchists do not look at Russia, China, or other upheavals. But Spain had a revolution in which the anarchists (mostly anarcho-syndicalists) played a major role. They had a relatively large anarchist organization (the FAI—Iberian Anarchist Federation) which led a major union federation (the CNT—National Confederation of Labour). This held at least a half of the organized working class—the Socialist Party (Marxist reformists) led the union federation of the other half (the UGT—General Union of Workers). In the most industrialized region in Spain, Catalonia, with its capital of Barcelona, the anarchist-led union predominated. With these advantages, how did the Spanish anarchists do when a revolutionary civil war broke out in 1936?

In 1936, Spain had elected a Popular Front government, replacing the previous very conservative regime. The Popular Front was composed of liberal and moderate pro-capitalist parties, plus the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. In left terminology, a “Popular Front” is different from a “United Front.” The United Front is an alliance only of working class groupings, such as the Socialists, Communists, and anarchists, in class opposition to the parties of the capitalist class. A Popular Front is a cross-class alliance of workers’ parties with parties representing a wing of the capitalist class. By its very nature, it cannot go beyond the limits of capitalism, if it wants to work with a party committed to capitalism. During the civil war, this regime was known as “Republicans” (they rejected the return of a monarchy) or “Loyalists.”

Despite the moderation of the Popular Front government, the right attempted to overthrow it in July 1936. The core of the right was the military, led by a thoroughly reactionary officer corps (which the Popular Front had not tried to disband). It also included a self-declared fascist movement (the “Falange”), monarchists, and ultra-conservative Catholics. During the war, these were lumped together as “Fascists” or “Rebels.”

The soldiers left their barracks in Spain to seize the cities, while importing a mercenary army which was based in the colony of Morocco. The Popular Front politicians waffled, insisted that nothing was happening, and refused to give arms to the workers. But the workers, rose up, formed committees, seized arms and dynamite, and beat back the soldiers in most

★ Conclusion

It may be objected that the Ukraine-Russia war is very different from either of my two examples. The position of anarchists in Ukraine, and their supporters around the world, is very different from that of the Spanish anarchists of the 'thirties, or of anti-imperialist militants in the movement against the war in Vietnam. All of which is true.

But some important lessons may be learned by revolutionary anarchists. One is not to participate in capitalist states, parties, or administrations, or support such forces (including states and parties which claim to be “socialist” or “communist” but are really state-capitalist). Instead, we struggle for a non-state radically-democratic federation of workers’ and popular councils and assemblies.

So long as the people cannot overthrow the state and capitalism, anarchists should participate in the military struggle against fascists or imperialist invaders. Joining the military effort, production in workplaces, and civil mobilization, anarchists simultaneously engage in a political struggle against the dominant regime. It is not necessary to give “critical support”, “political support”, or any other kind of support to governments to be in solidarity with the people of a country fighting for independence, democratic self-determination, and (relative) national freedom.

Imperialist support for a rebelling people does not settle the nature of the conflict. There was British and French influence on the Loyalist side of the Spanish civil war and a degree of Russian support, but that did not determine the nature of the conflict. Russia and China gave aid to the Vietnamese forces, but that did not override the nature of the war as one for self-determination. Nor does U.S. aid to Ukraine deny that the war is essentially and mainly a war of defence and self-determination for the Ukrainian people.

These are some of the lessons we can all learn from studying past revolutions and wars.

of the country. What was to have been a quick coup became a drawn-out and vicious civil war.

The anarchists’ leaders felt that they were in a quandary. The Republican state had essentially collapsed. The army, most of the police, and much of the government officials had gone over to the Fascists. So had the businesspeople and agrarian landlords. In their place were the working people, using the existing union structures but also organizing a multitude of committees for defence, policing the streets, distributing food, setting up militia forces to go fight the fascists, and taking over factories, farms, and businesses to keep them running.

Under these conditions it might have seemed logical for the anarchists (of the CNT union and FAI anarchist association) to “take power” at least in Catalonia. But they did not. (“Taking power”, if we use that phrase, for anarchists does not mean “taking state power.” It means the working people overthrow the state and capital and establish alternate, federated, participatory-democratic, institutions, but not a socially-alienated bureaucratic-military elite machine over the rest of society—that is, not a new state.)

The leading anarchists feared antagonizing the non-anarchists, who were half the organized working class. They argued that if their union took over, this would establish a “dictatorship.” Better to have a “democratic” collaboration with pro-capitalist liberals! (This could have been approached by forming broad workers’ and peasants’ councils, in which members of all parties and unions could participate.) They feared losing the support of the Popular Front parties. They feared the reaction from the imperialist democracies (France, the UK, and also the US).

Instead of promoting a revolution from below, the anarchist leadership made alliances with the bourgeois Republican parties. Within a brief time period, they had joined the Popular Front, and entered the government (actually two governments, one at the regional level in Catalonia and the national state regime). Influential militants ended up supporting the capitalist state and serving in various administrative positions. The same was true of the smaller but still significant left-Marxists of the POUM (Party of Marxist Unification). Some of its leaders had previously been influenced by Leon Trotsky, but he denounced them for joining the Popular Front governments and broke with them. (Trotsky 1973) Whatever their subjective goals, the leaders of the CNT—FAI and of the POUM became complicit in the rebuilding of the state.

However, without the revolutionary spirit of the mass of people, and without the flexibility of the revolutionary forces, the war became a standard war. Urban uprisings and guerrilla tactics were ruled out. This gave the advantage to the regular Spanish army on the fascist side. This was especially true since Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were sending arms and soldiers to them, while the “democracies” would not send military aid to the Republic.

Comparing the current Ukrainian war with the Spanish civil war, the Ukrainian anarchists have not made this political mistake. As far as I know, even while supporting the Ukrainian side of the war, they have not voted for or endorsed V. Zelensky as president, nor his political party or any other party, nor joined the government as politicians or administrators. Nor have any of their left critics accused them of doing this. In fact they have opposed the government’s neo-liberal austerity program and anti-union policies.

★ A Revolutionary Anarchist Program

While the leadership of the anarchists became more and more drawn into supporting the state, opposition developed among other anarchists, especially in the ranks of the CNT and among women anarchists. One such group was the Friends of Durruti, but by no means the only one. (This is covered extensively in Evans 2020. Also Guillamon 1996.) Diverse opinions were expressed, but overall there appeared a common revolutionary program, counterposed to that of the anarchist leadership.

This program included quitting the Popular Front and the capitalist government in all aspects. Expropriation of the capitalists and landlords and “socialization” of the economy—not government nationalization but industrial management by the workers, through their unions and/or workers’ councils, coordinating themselves, and peasant self-collectivization of agriculture. (Both were done, very successfully, in Catalonia and other parts of Spain; see Dolgoff 1974.) Arms for the fighters and militia people at the front, with the armed forces being voluntary and self-organized. “As to the army, we want a revolutionary one led exclusively by workers...” (Balius 1978; p. 37) Arms for the workers and peasants in the rear areas, distributed and organized by popular committees—replacing the police and rearguard armed forces.

but non-imperialist poor nation). Russia is not fighting a proxy war but is engaging in direct aggression. Nor are the Ukrainians fighting a proxy war. It is they who are spilling their blood, fighting directly against the invaders of their country. Whatever the U.S. is paying in armaments, the Ukrainians are paying with their lives. Whatever the motives of the U.S. and its NATO allies, and even whatever is the motivation of the Ukrainian state, the people have their own interest in driving out the occupiers and mass murderers. That they take arms from the Western governments means little—they need arms and where else can they get them? The Spanish Republic bought arms from Stalinist Russia and tried to get arms from France and the U.S. While libertarian radicals opposed the North Vietnamese state for its Stalinist authoritarianism, no one condemned it for taking arms from Russia.

This analysis would change under different circumstances. This would become mainly a war between imperialist sides if, for example, the U.S. were to send its army into Ukraine to fight the Russians, or if missiles were exchanged, back and forth, between Russia and the NATO countries. Then both sides should be opposed because the main issue would be the warfare between imperialist powers. But this has not happened.

It is not unknown, in a world divided by competing imperialisms, that one empire would give aid to the rebelling colonies of another. In World War II, the Nazis gave support to Arabs against their Western colonizers, and the Japanese posed as champions of Asians and Africans against British and French imperialists—while the U.S. and the Allies became all for the self-determination of occupied European and other countries (but not Ireland).

In the Cold War, the Soviet Union gave support, even money, to national opponents of Western imperialism. This was not only to Communist movements and regimes such as in Vietnam or Cuba, but also to non-Communist nationalists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Meanwhile the U.S. gave at least verbal support to the “captive nations” in Eastern Europe, against their Russian masters. So, it is hardly surprising that the U.S. should give support to Ukraine as a way to kick Russia in the teeth, or to Taiwan to push back at the Chinese state. This says nothing about whether to support the self-determination of the Ukrainians or Taiwanese. The question is what do they want.

Another related issue is that of inter-imperialist conflict. U.S. apologists argued that the rebellion in South Vietnam was part of a spread of world Communism. It was supposedly masterminded by the Kremlin or maybe by Mao. They denied that the Vietnamese could be their own agents. Everything was reduced to Cold War platitudes.

The Russians and Chinese did provide important aid to North Vietnam (not much to the NLF in the South). Ho Chi Minh and his closest comrades had been disciplined supporters of Stalin for decades, following every twist and turn of international Communist politics. Yet he had his own national interests, which were not simply the same as Russia's. And the Vietnamese people had been fighting for their national freedom for generations. They supported Ho and the Communists only because they believed that they were leading a fight for independence. While the rivalry between the U.S. state and Russia (and China) was a significant backdrop to the war, it was not the main issue. That was the struggle for Vietnam's self-determination.

The same issue has come up in the Ukraine-Russia war. When Ukraine first showed that it could resist the Russian invasion, the Western imperialists decided to give it military and other aid, short of sending in troops (which the Ukrainians did not ask for). By now there is massive arms shipments, satellite and computer information, and troop training going from the U.S. and NATO to the Ukrainians.

Many on the left denounce this as essentially a war between imperialists, being a "proxy war" for the U.S. They focus on events leading up to the war, such as the expansion of NATO up to Russia's borders. They point out (correctly) that the U.S. is the strongest imperialist power on earth, in its wealth and its military power (even if in decline). Given the record of the U.S. (such as in Vietnam, not to speak of Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Central America, Haiti, Cuba, Africa, and so on), the Western imperialists are not acting out of concern for democracy, freedom, and the rights of oppressed nations. They act on their interest in keeping the U.S. dominant in the world, beating back the Russians and making points to the Chinese rulers. Therefore, many conclude that leftists should support any power that challenges the U.S., even if it is a rival imperialism or an oppressive dictatorship (this is "campism").

While it is important to look at the inter-imperialist "background" of the war, it is also important to focus on the immediate "foreground." This is the Russian imperialist invasion of a neighbouring country (a capitalist

Spreading the popular committees—for defence, policing, industrial production, farming, and decision-making, including all working people, regardless of union or party affiliation. These would centrally coordinate by federating regionally and nationally. The Friends of Durruti Group proposed to replace the state with a "Revolutionary Junta"—meaning a national coordinating council democratically elected by the workers, peasants, and militia fighters. "Unity of the barricades"—alliance of anarchists with all revolutionary forces, including left Marxists: the left of the POUM and the left of the Socialist Party.

The Spanish Trotskyists—not the POUM—supported this program, but were very small. (See Morrow 1974) This is not to go into the differences of their goals from the anarchists. Today's Trotskyists sometimes condemn anarchism because the leading Spanish anarchists abandoned their program and joined the capitalist state. This is a valid criticism, but it ignores the fact that many anarchists disagreed with this policy. Also, that the big majority of Marxists—the Socialists, the Communists, the POUM—also joined the capitalist state.

There were other issues. Anarchist women organized for women's open and equal participation in the armed struggle and in all areas of social life. They had to fight against patriarchal and sexist attitudes among many male anarchists. There was the question of national self-determination for the colony of Morocco. A large part of the Spanish army was composed of Moroccans. Their loyalty to the Fascist army might have been severely shaken if the Spanish Loyalists had promised Morocco independence, or at least, autonomy. Anarchists and Moroccan nationalists proposed this but the Popular Front politicians would not hear of it. Among other factors, such a move would have antagonized the French and British governments, who had their own large colonies in North Africa and the Middle East! (In the end, these governments, and the US, gave little help to the Republic, even though France also had a Popular Front government. The only government which did sell—not give—Spain much armament was the Soviet Union—at a high price, financially and politically.)

How would such a revolutionary program be achieved, with the civil war raging, in the lull between revolutionary upsurges? Just as some anarchists today do not support either side of the Ukrainian-Russian war, so some revolutionaries did not support either side in the Spanish civil war. This included the Bordiguists (the "Italian Faction" of "ultra-left," authoritarian, and very sectarian Marxists) and some in the Trotskyist milieu who were to the left of Trotsky. These supported neither the Fascists nor

the Republicans. The Republic, they pointed out, was a capitalist state as well as imperialist. Revolutionary socialists did not take sides in wars between capitalist states, they said.

A Bordiguist writes of Spain's civil war, "War between a fascist state and an antifascist state is not a revolutionary class war. The proletariat's intervention on one side is an indication that it has already been defeated.... War on the military fronts implied abandonment of the class terrain... [and] defeat for the revolutionary process." (Guillamon 1996; p. 10)

This sounds very similar to arguments being raised now by parts of the left, particularly anarchists, for not supporting the Ukrainians in their war of national defence and self-determination against imperialist Russia. Russia and Ukraine are both capitalist nation states, and Ukraine, if not also imperialist, is getting military aid from US imperialism.

In Spain, at the time, few if any anarchists accepted such arguments. They knew the workers would not understand this "radical" justification for non-participation in the fight against the Fascists. In World War I the main issue had been the imperialist competition for markets, profits, and power. In the Spanish civil war, imperialism was not the main issue. It was the fight to preserve workers' freedoms and rights (even as limited as they were under bourgeois democracy) from fascism. Even more, the possibility of moving from capitalism to anarchist-socialism was infinitely greater if the Fascists were being defeated by the revolutionary struggles of the working class, even if it was, at first, under the rule of the Republican capitalists.

The left-anarchist Friends of Durruti Group laid out their approach this way:

"There must be no collaboration with capitalism whether outside the bourgeois state or from within the government itself. As producers our place is in the unions, reinforcing the only bodies that ought to survive a revolution by the workers. Class struggle is no obstacle to workers continuing at present to fight on the battlefields and working in the war industries...."

"We are opposed to collaboration with bourgeois groups. We do not believe the class approach can be abandoned. Revolutionary workers must not shoulder official posts, nor establish themselves in ministries. For as long as the war lasts, collaboration is permissible—on the battlefield, in the trenches, on the parapets and in productive labour in the rearguard...." (Balius 1978; pp 35, 38)

have no legitimate interests in the internal affairs of Ukraine. The Russians should withdraw. Advocating anything less is to accept that Russia has good reasons to be in Ukraine, and to be implicitly on its side of the war. Of course there will be talks, but the central issue remains: the Russian military must leave Ukraine, all of Ukraine, every square inch. "Out Now!"

Another related issue is that of national self-determination versus support for the government. In the Vietnam-U.S. war, many on the left became fanatical supporters of the Stalinist leadership of the national struggle. But we unorthodox and dissident Trotskyists, libertarian Marxists, and anarchists knew better. We were not surprised when Vietnam became a repressive one-party dictatorship and (mixed) state-capitalist economy after the war. We had predicted it. Those of us who supported the Vietnamese side had not been supporters of the North Vietnamese state nor the leadership of the NLF. We had been in solidarity with the Vietnamese people, mainly its peasants and workers. We supported their right to determine their own future, their independence, their economic and political system, whatever we thought of it.

No one has illusions that Ukraine is a "socialist" country. It has a capitalist economy (dominated by "oligarchs") and a bourgeois-democratic representative government. The government is notoriously corrupt. There is a nationalist, neo-Nazi, movement in the country, although it has limited political power. These facts are used by some to justify non-support for the Ukrainian side, treating it as just as bad as the Russian imperialist aggressors.

However, the issue is not whether to support Zelensky's government, nor even the Ukrainian state. Revolutionary anarchists do not. It is whether we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Aside from the state or the "oligarchs," they have their own interests in not being invaded, occupied, bombed, driven from their homes, their children taken away and sent to Russia, their language suppressed, their people tortured, raped, and murdered, and their national resources looted. At present they support capitalism and the state. Maybe that will change over time. Ukrainian anarchists and socialists are working for that. That is the peoples' decision, not the decision of the U.S. left or foreign anarchists, any more than it should be the decision of the Russian army or the Wagner mercenaries. It is a matter of national self-determination.

This is not an overview of the Vietnam-U.S. war nor of the U.S. anti-war movement, which played a part in the defeat of the U.S. As a young man, I participated in the U.S. anti-war movement, as an anarchist-pacifist and then an unorthodox Trotskyist (eventually I evolved into a revolutionary anarchist-socialist). I observed the war very intently. Meanwhile I put a lot of effort to keep from being drafted into the army. (For an overview of the war and the anti-war movement, see Neale 2003.)

★ Lessons of the Vietnam-U.S. War for Supporters of Ukraine

The U.S. anti-war movement had various divisions. On the right were liberal Democrats and moderate pacifists, mostly supported by pro-Moscow Communists. Their slogan was “Negotiations Now!” They called on the U.S. government to negotiate with the North Vietnamese and the NLF. The right-wing was for relying on the Democrats, which was a limited approach given that the war had been initiated and expanded by Democratic presidents and politicians.

On the left were radical pacifists and various Trotskyists (there were a few anarchists and libertarian Marxists). Maoists went back and forth. The left wing opposed the slogan of “Negotiations.” What was there to negotiate? they asked. The slogan implied that both sides had legitimate interests to be discussed. But the U.S. had invaded Vietnam and it should immediately leave. Of course the war would end with talks, but that was beside the point; it was important to take a clear political and moral stance against the U.S. being in the war. Their slogans were “Immediate Withdrawal,” “Bring the Troops Home Now!” or simply “Out Now!” Over time, this view came to predominate in the movement. (There were other controversies, such as whether the movement should only deal with the war or should raise other issues, such as racism. I will not go into that here.)

The relevance of this debate to the Ukraine-Russia war is obvious. Many peace-loving, “anti-war,” people have called for “negotiations” to end the war—for the U.S. state to pressure the Ukrainians to negotiate with Putin. But the point is the same. What, in principle, is there to negotiate about? The Russians started the war by invading their neighbour. They

In Spain, there was a second flare up of working class struggle in May 1937. There was a conflict between the CNT workers, who controlled the central telephone building in Barcelona, and the police, directed by the Communist Party (now completely Stalinist). The police attacked the telephone center, in an effort to take it away from the workers. They were driven off and the city’s workers rose up and took over the streets. A true revolution could have been consummated there, with the workers taking over a major region and appealing to the workers and peasants throughout Spain. Instead, the leaders of the CNT (and POUM) ordered the workers back to work, insisting on peace and cooperation with the Stalinized police (that is, capitulation to the re-consolidation of the capitalist state). After that, the war dragged on for a couple of years until the fascists won, but the possibility of revolution had been defeated.

Unfortunately, while the anarchist left had developed a program for revolution, it had not organized itself to fight for these policies. It was too tied to its traditional organizations and their leaders. There were elements of an organization that could have widely raised this program and organized an alternative to the established Socialists, POUMists, and influential anarchists. But these elements never coalesced into a single strong grouping or even into a united front of revolutionary groupings. (I am not speaking of a “party” in the sense of a centralized organization which aims to take power for itself, set up its own state, and rule over [“lead”] the people, but for an organization to fight for a revolutionary program.) So the programs of the “reasonable,” “practical,” anarchists and socialists, of allying with the capitalists and subordinating themselves to the Stalinists, led to disaster. As a world movement, anarchism received a great defeat.

There are justified wars (as evil as war always is), such as the Spanish civil war against fascism or the current Ukrainian war of national self-determination. While a capitalist state still rules, anarchists should not give any support to the government. They should politically criticize it and spread their own propaganda. Meanwhile they should participate in the just struggle, along with the rest of the working class and oppressed. They should work in the industries and serve in the armed forces, and do their best to defeat the enemy militarily. Their aim is to get enough support and agreement from the people so that at some point (during or after the war) the people will make a revolution. They will overthrow the state, expropriate the rich, and replace capitalism with a self-managed, free, and cooperative society.

How this general strategy is carried out, of course, depends on the concrete situation of the country and the world, the time and place. In Ukraine today, anarchists are a small political tendency, but almost all support the war against the invasion. None have given political support to the Zelensky government. Some engage in non-military activities, such as working in hospitals or feeding people. Others form anarchist and anti-fascist groups that become part of the Territorial Defence network. Others join the regular armed forces wherever they can. This does not stop them from being anarchists.

★ The Vietnam-U.S. War

The Vietnam-U.S. war (1960--1975) was called the "Vietnam War" in the U.S. and the "American War" in Vietnam. Whether it was a revolution has been argued about. (But then, people are still arguing whether 1776 in the U.S. was a "revolution" or a "war for independence.") Yet old ruling classes (semi-feudal landlords and royalty, French businesspeople, military officers, and U.S. officials) were thrown out and a new one took power. This was a state-capitalist Communist bureaucracy, not, alas, the peasants and workers of Vietnam. During the period of the war, a great many on the left had illusions that some sort of socialist people's revolution was going on. They were wrong. (For an account by a Vietnamese socialist of the brutal, treacherous, and tyrannical history of Ho's Communists, see Van 2010.)

My comments here focus on aspects of the U.S. anti-war movement. (In Vietnam itself, Trotskyists and other dissidents such as anarchists, had been ruthlessly eliminated by the Communists.) For those radicals who saw through the "socialist" and "democratic" veil covering the Vietnamese Stalinists, it was seen as a war for self-determination, unification, and independence, whatever we thought of Ho Chi Minh and his party. For historical reasons, the Communists had won the support of the people as the leaders of their national liberation struggle. The peasants and workers of Vietnam should be able to decide their own future, not the U.S. army nor the U.S.'s bought-and-paid-for puppets.

To an extent, the Vietnam-U.S. War was a mirror image of the Ukraine-Russia War. The imperialist power was the U.S.A., with Russia supporting

the national rebellion. After the Vietnamese had kicked out the French imperialists, the U.S. moved in. The country had been divided into two, against the will of the people, with the Stalinists taking the North. The U.S. state supported local politicians and military figures, subsidizing these puppets, until it became clear that they could not hold South Vietnam against North Vietnam and their own people. Rather than giving it up as a bad job, the U.S. doubled down, pouring soldiers and money into South Vietnam. At its height there were 500 thousand U.S. soldiers there.

Supporters of the U.S. war effort tried to make it look like the war in the South was not an indigenous rebellion against a reactionary ruling class and foreign occupation. They claimed that the Southern resistance (the National Liberation Front or NLF—called "Viet Cong" by the U.S. forces) were mere puppets of the Northern government. And that the government of North Vietnam was a mere puppet of either Maoist China or the Soviet Union—which were fiercely antagonistic to each other at the time. (North Vietnam very carefully did not take sides in the Russian/Chinese polemics against each other.)

In truth, the NLF was politically controlled by the Northern state (contrary to many leftists who had illusions in its independence). Yet it was supported by nationalist sentiment and a genuine popular hatred of the invaders. Russia gave military aid to the North, which Mao let them send through China. This aid, while far less than the U.S. sent to its agents, was extremely important to keep the North in the war. However, to see the North as a puppet of other countries was delusional.

After decades of struggle against the French and the U.S., the Vietnamese won their war. They won independence and unification. On a world scale, this was a great setback for U.S. imperialism. For years, U.S. leaders bemoaned the "Vietnam syndrome"—the reluctance of the U.S. population to support more foreign wars. This victory was won at a great cost of so many dead, so much destroyed, so much land and forest poisoned. The country was now taken over by a Communist Party dictatorship and a state-capitalist economy. Thousands fled, by land and sea. However, there was no widespread massacre, as did happen in neighbouring Kampuchea (Cambodia) under ultra-Stalinist Pol Pot. There were wars between Vietnam and its "comradely" neighbours in China and Kampuchea. Today the rulers of Vietnam encourage U.S. capitalists to invest in their country, using their cheap labour and lack of independent unions as selling points.