Ukrainian Women Say: “Nothing About Us Without Us”

written by Tanya Vyhovsky | October 25, 2026

Editor’s note: The following presentation by Tanya Vyhovsky, Ukrainian American Vermont State Senator, was delivered virtually from Ukraine to a panel at the Left Coast Forum in Los Angeles on October 3, 2026.

We are living in a moment in time where global authoritarianism is once again rising, and imperialist nation states are fighting for their sphere of influence and talking amongst each other about dividing up the world among them without any care for the people that they are harming.

We as leftists often are very clear on U.S. imperialism. We are less clear on imperialism in other places in the world. I want to be very clear that Russian imperialism is very real today and has been very real for a long time.

Nothing has gone to increase the war machine, particularly in Europe, more than allowing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is driving the current militarization of Germany. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, I have been very worried about the possibility of World War III.

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, and there was very little global response. .A compromise was made, and it was fine as long as Russia didn’t go further. But of course it did.

In 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we saw what had happened when Russia was not stopped.

Being on the ground in Ukraine right now, I will tell you that the bombs are falling constantly, the air raids are sounding constantly, and that is a direct result of U.S. and international policy not allowing Ukraine to use the missile defense system to keep those bombs from hitting schools and hospitals.

In Kyiv yesterday, there were only 80 minutes of the day where there wasn’t an air raid siren. Children in Ukraine are learning in subway stations and bomb shelters.

This is damaging to the people here. This is damaging to the children who are growing up here, and that is not even to mention the 20,000 plus children that have been kidnapped by Russia and forced into re-education camps or forcible adoptions into Russian families while their families are still at home.

Think of the harm that this does to the families in Ukraine and the children who have been forced into these re-education facilities where they are tortured and taught that they are not Ukrainian, that Ukraine doesn’t exist, that they are Russian. People living in the occupied regions of Ukraine are not allowed to speak Ukrainian.

They are not allowed food and water. Oleshky [in the Russian occupied region] currently is in a humanitarian crisis where humanitarian aid channels have not been allowed, and food has not been delivered for months. Recently, the Ukrainian military dropped food there by drones, and people were beaten for taking it.

This is not what we should accept as socialists and leftists, and this is not peace. I think we have to ask ourselves what peace actually is, when we stand in a position of being pacifists and being anti-war.

Because nobody living in occupied Ukraine is experiencing peace. Everyone living in Kyiv, where there are bombs falling from the sky all but 80 minutes a day, are not experiencing peace. And asking the people living in this to simply accept this is unacceptable.

We have heard a lot of claims about the Ukrainian government being an authoritarian regime and claims that there are Nazis that are in Ukraine. In fact, in the 2019 election, the far right in Ukraine did not gain enough traction to pick up a single seat in parliament.

Are there far-right people in Ukraine? Of course there are. There are far-right people in every country, every nation, including ours, the U.S. Is the government problematic? Is the Ukrainian government a neoliberal government that is harming people with capitalist ideals and experiencing corruption? Yes, it is.

You cannot simply say to the Ukrainians, you must choose one or the other. We can be opposed to the government in Ukraine and opposed to Russian imperialism and the horrors that Russian imperialism is dishing out to the Ukrainian people. We can stand in solidarity with the very real leftist movement in Ukraine that still takes to the street to protest their government in the middle of the horrors of war.

When I was here in Ukraine last year, it was right on the tail end of the Ukrainian government's rolling back its anti-corruption policy. The Ukrainian people took to the streets, they said no, and they won. Those anti-corruption policies were put back in place. Now, are they strong enough? No, they are not strong enough. Are Ukrainian oligarchs making huge amounts of money off of this war and buying million-dollar homes in other places? Yes, they are. But we do not solve that problem by saying it's fine for Russia to invade. The Ukrainian left will not get stronger under Russian occupation.

So we need to truly ask ourselves what it means to stand with the people of Ukraine; what it means to stand with the children learning in subways and bomb shelters; what it means to stand with the feminist movement here in Ukraine that is actively fighting for better access to abortion care which is legal in Ukraine, and actively fighting to move forward with full legalization of LGBTQ relationships and marriages. They are in the streets fighting for that, and they are in the streets fighting for that while bombs fall on them and drones hit their hospitals.

The nurses are a group of women that have been particularly impacted. Their workload has skyrocketed in this occupation and war. Their pay has not kept up, and yet they continue to go to work because they have to. There is a nursing shortage in Ukraine, amongst many other things, and the Ukrainian nursing population, much like many countries, is predominantly women.

Women work full shifts and then volunteer after work to cook and do a variety of work to help people at the front. They freeze-dry food to send to the places that are cut off from supply chains by drones, and weave camouflage mats to protect people on the front line. These women are working sometimes 24 hours a day to hold their country together.

And if we truly want a socialist future for Ukraine, as some people in Ukraine do and are planning for, that will never happen under Russian occupation. Russia has been very clear that the only way the violence in Ukraine ends is when Ukraine no longer exists. This is genocidal ideation and will never lead to peace.

So I think we have to ask ourselves if we are okay with a country quite clearly stating that their goal is to wipe out a population. Russia wants genocide and the erasure of Ukraine.

We need to support this young democracy in figuring out how they can do better. Currently the only options they see are those of being destroyed by Russia or being more like the United States. And neither of those options are a good option.

We know that people in the United States are being harmed by free market capitalism and by the horrific authoritarianism rising. We need to create another path and stand in solidarity with leftists, feminists, and the children of Ukraine.

How do we stand up and fight back?

There is a Convoy coming up in Europe this Autumn that is sending material goods to Ukraine. Ukraine is preparing for an even more intensified bombing from Russia in the Winter of 2027.

As I sit here in Ukraine at 2 a.m. in the morning, I know that 3 out of the 5 bridges leading to this city have been bombed by Russia in the past few days. This is not acceptable. The Russian bombs are already targeting the electrical grid and people are regularly without power and water. This is manageable right now because it is not yet that cold but as winter comes this also will mean there is no heat.

Ukrainians know that the options of being destroyed by Russian drones/bombs or being a country more like the U.S. under the Trump administration are not good options for them and the left has already drawn up plans for a greener, more just Ukraine after the war.

But the paradigm that presents the U.S. as the only imperialist power in the world is patently false and will not help us to achieve a better and more peaceful world. Faced with being forced to choose between two imperialist camps, what does international feminist solidarity look like?

To answer this I take an idea from the US disability rights movement, “Nothing About Us Without Us.” The Ukrainian Left including Sotsiyalnyi Rukh (Social Movement), the feminist movement in Lviv and organized nurses have connected across issues and are already thinking about ideas for rebuilding and they should be central in the conversation about what that looks like. It is not acceptable for us or anyone to tell them how they should exist in order for us to say no to Russian imperialism. Yes, there are problems to solve that existed before the full scale invasion and the Ukrainian left knows this – however aligning with a genocidal force because of this is simply unacceptable.

[This is one of a series of contributions presented at a conference on “Redefining International Socialist Feminist Anti-War Solidarity” on October 3, 2026 in Los Angeles and posted on the *New Politics* site.]