

THE  
**Final  
Straw**  
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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**ANARCHISTS  
IN UKRAINE  
AGAINST WAR**

**The Final Straw Radio**  
**Feb 25, 2022**

really political movements should do, like we see it a lot in Kurdistan, for example, this maneuvering to protect their own perspective and sovereignty. And this is at least in much less chaos than in Kurdistan, but in principle is the same as we are trying to do here.

Another important problem is, I will say ideological assimilation to the State discourse, because many people even who associate themselves with the anarchist movement, starting to say, “okay, we are not now just need to defend our country.” Well, in this situation to defend your country is pretty good, but this is not enough at all for the anarchist revolutionary. You need to develop some perspective for changes, like some ideas on how you want to influence political and social situations within the country. And this is also the matter of discussions of, somehow even very hot discussions, and our continuous thinking here. But more or less, most of us agree that we need within this struggle, anti-imperialist struggle, our participation in it. We need to express, to develop and express our anarchist narrative and program and ideas.

**TFSR: Thank you so much Ilya, for having this conversation with me. And we'll be sure to provide the the links that comrades in Ukraine have shared to keep up and I hope that this conversation helps get more people in the streets and good luck.**

**Ilya:** Thanks a lot to you. Good luck. We're staying in contact.

**TFSR: Please. Yeah, and solidarity and share my love with the people there. I'll let you go now. But take care.**

**Ilya:** Yeah, thanks a lot. We are now here with the comrades finding out ways to do and we say greetings to you. Thanks for your support.

**TFSR: Solidarity. Ciao.**

needs to be anti-imperialist resistance with some really social-revolutionary goals and prospects. Also, the next challenge to us if we will be able to form our structures, both in terms of self-defense, and of civil organizing, and as long as we will be able to do it, we need growing support informationally, and also by the actions of solidarity, and also maybe by some material support, of course, from our Western comrades. So any expression of solidarity already now is extremely appreciated and extremely needed throughout all the world.

If you want to make graffiti, do it, if you want to make demonstration against Russian or Belarusian embassy, do it. This is also a good point to support anarchists political prisoners, of which there are a lot of in Russia and Belarus. If you want to collect some money, do it, if you want to spread our information (which I hope will be extensively translated, like published first and translated into English as well), this is also a very good way to express your solidarity. So I believe solidarity actions are media and information will help. And also providing material support an infrastructural support for us, for anarchist movement here, for libertarian movement here, would be really good grounds for us to rely on.

**TFSR: I guess one more question is.. So, I've seen this discussed a little bit, not not the perspectives of people in Ukraine, but other anarchists elsewhere, talking about the difficulty of being engaged in or around official State organizations of defense, while keeping autonomy and keeping an anti-state, pro-social perspective. Can you talk a little bit about that balance? And what sort of discussions, anarchists and anti-authoritarian leftists in Ukraine are having about that?**

**Ilya:** Yes, I think I can do it. Of course. Especially, this is the hard question in terms of self-defense because every authorized self-defense is coming from the state, more or less. So there is a challenge, like if we want to have self-defense and not be confronted on every front as we are a very few, so we need to collaborate somehow with the state military structures. And the question is, how not to assimilate to these structures, but still collaborate somehow having some sorts of autonomy and our own vision and perspective.

Well, I don't want to lie to say that we have a perfect plan how to do it, but definitely we realize this problem and we will work and find some, I would say, tricky ways to do it to really have self-defense as independent from the state structures as possible. And I think this is what

On Thursday, February 24th, I spoke with Ilya, a Russian anarchist living and organizing in Kyiv, Ukraine. We spoke about the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, the Maidan uprising and war in the Donbass, resistance to the invasion of Ukraine and the Putin regime, conspiracy theories about Ukraine promoted by Russia and Russian-aligned media outlets, critiques of the Ukrainian state, and anarchists choosing their own path of self-defense and revolutionary mutual aid in the face of invading armies.

At the time of publishing, if you want to learn more, follow anarchists organizing resistance on the ground in Ukraine and find out how to donate to their initiatives and share your solidarity by **visiting <https://linktr.ee/operation.solidarity>**.

To hear interviews about resistance and repression in Russia from the last decade, check out our past interviews. You can also find an interview from the period of the Maidan protests as well as experiences from Belarus.

We're releasing this episode a little early to get this voice out at such an important moment. No war but the class war, y'all!

Search for this interview title at **<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/>** to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

**TSFR: Would you please introduce yourself with whatever name, preferred gender pronouns, location or political affiliations that make sense for this conversation?**

**Ilya:** Yes, my name is Ilya . I am an anarchist from Russia, currently living in Kyiv and staying in Kyiv.

**TSFR: I'd like to ask you a bit about what's been going on in Ukraine for the last few months, with international tensions. But I kind of feel like a brief rundown of the sort of the relationship between Ukraine historically and with Russia would be kind of helpful. Could you speak a little bit about the historical relationship? Or the Soviet Union as it was at one point? What sort of like emotional or nationalist claims does Russia make for occupying Crimea or for occupying Ukraine?**

**Ilya:** Oh, yes, sure, we have some, like big tensions at least from the autumn. But it also happened through past several years, several times already, where some threat of war was believed to be in the air. But as we see only now, it really came into reality at full scale.

So this is... how to say, this strategy of blackmailing and of pressure, which was made by the Putinist government on the local authorities, also on the local system. And the relations are very bad between the two countries since 2014. Since after Maidan protests of 2013-14 and removal of the pro-Russian President Yanukovich, Russia invaded Crimea and annexed it and also invaded the Donbass region, using some more loyal parts of the local population to Russia. So historically, I guess maybe it doesn't making a lot of sense to go really deep into the historical context. So we can say briefly that in the very old times, maybe around 1000 or 700 years ago who are today Ukrainians and Russians (then just Eastern Slavic peoples) were a part of common political entity and also have common linguistic group. We are all still in the Eastern Slavic group, both Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, which speak pretty close languages. But then their historical ways, they really separated for some reasons. And then by the end, it started already in 17th century and finished in late 18th century, when the territory of modern Ukraine was incorporated into the Russian Empire. And since then, we can speak actually about colonization of local territories by the Russian empire. With the Soviet revolution, labels changed, the equality of peoples was declared and also internationalism as a main policy, but still actually we can say that Soviet Union in many

anarchist movement, and I would say leftist movement in general, found itself in depression in Ukraine for years. But in the last few years, I think, we can speak about restoring movement because a lot of old participants and also new participants as well, are really making some analytical work around what needs to be done for the movement to reconstruct itself, to organize better and which alternatives we can provide for the society.

Of course, we need to confront a lot this nationalist sentiment, like about "our state of Ukraine," this national sentiment, of course, is widespread within the society. This pro-Western sentiment I already mentioned about people dreaming of a good Western-like life. This is something we really need to work with and fight against. But this is possible. And of course, this, how to say, this "gray zone of Europe," this weak state... Because Russia looks pretty stable, even though I believe that it's not like this, actually. I don't know, good English words for it, but the Russian Putinist regime is something super big which will collapse very quickly finally, i believe. The European Union, of course, looks as well pretty stable. And Ukraine is not like this. So of course, this is naturally the ground for the grassroots organizing and for some really very different political alternatives to be developed and presented, including our ones.

**TSFR: : So I guess in your view, and I know you've kind of addressed this already, but how have anarchists abroad been reacting to these developments? Not knowing what's coming, for sure. But I mean, since the shellings already started, it seems kind of clear, but the situation might change... What forms of solidarity would you like to see coming from abroad?**

**For instance, Crimethinc just put out a tweet about calling for tonight at 7pm or 6pm everywhere for there to be demonstrations at Russian embassies. Is this one of the things that you'd like to see, is there more than that, that you'd like to see?**

**Ilya:** Oh, yes.

First of all, I want to greet my comrades in Moscow, which yesterday held their actions against the invasions. It was anarchists who organized them and several were arrested. It means that actually anarchist comrades and some anti-war actions there actually already exist in Russia.

So the situation here now is actually first of all, a challenge for us... Will we be able to develop the narrative, the concept of libertarian participation, meaningful participation in this anti-imperialist resistance. It

they're from Kharkiv, from eastern cities, which are predominantly Russians-speaking. So here you can have a lot of Russian-speaking Nazis actually. So when somebody tries to portray that this is Ukrainian-speaking population against Russian-speaking population, this is a pure hoax and tricks.

So yes, as I said already before, Nazis are present a lot in local political life, this is true. But they are still much more weak than for example, just Oligarchical forces. Like, they are visible, they are horrible, but when somebody tries to manipulate that Ukrainian somehow a "Nazi state," or a fascist state, this is of course, this is just a lie. This is just not true. And this is just a tool of manipulation for pro-Putinist forces, which unfortunately, too, grounds also in Western so-called "Anti-imperialist Movement," because, a really anti-imperialist movement needs to be today with us here confronting this purely imperialist aggression.

**TFSR: : It seems like the opportunity is present, with the recognition that Nazis have been able to organize, far-right has been able to organize, and also that the Putinist forces are simultaneously trying to, they're taking ground quite literally... It seems like an opportunity for anarchists and anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalists to reach out to their neighbors, provide alternatives, offer what you mentioned with mutual aid and also coordinating. Obviously, people tried to do that during the Maidan and got outflanked, basically.**

Can you talk about the situation of anarchists and anti-authoritarian movements in Ukraine at the moment? I just saw messages this morning on social media of many anarchists, who had had to flee Belarus, for instance, to Ukraine deciding to stay and to try to defend the population against invasion. And it seems like a lot of people are sort of hunkering down and making that decision to stay. Can you talk about what that anarchist movement looks like?

**Ilya:** Yes, of course, I would say that Maidan was a really hard blow and the source of depression for the anarchist movement, because it provided a lot of splits about attitude and position about Maidan. Some comrades took one ground, other comrades took another one. And this provided a lot of quarrels. But even more was the negative influence that Maidan actually appeared as this "betrayed revolution," as I already said before. Some people really believe that it would lead to some positive political changes, but it hardly led to any good changes within the society. So the

aspects, was still a very imperially designed state, with the center in Moscow with the predominance of Russian language. And in many different ways centered the political and economical system of Moscow, of Russia.

So after Soviet Union collapsed, all the republics which constructed the Soviet Union in general, they got actual state independence. But then after Putin came into power in 1999, he started this, I would say, neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist organizational politics of restoring the Russian State influence on the former Soviet Union area. His politics about helping pro-Russian presidents to come into power like with Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine, and then harsh reaction in situations like when these presidents were overthrown, especially by the popular uprising, such as the Maidan uprising. It was even not electoral protest process, it was a really popular movement which threw Yanukovich out of power and kept him out. Since then, I think we can count the start of the modern stage of Ukrainian-Russian relations, since 2014 with the Yanukovich ousting and Crimea annexation.

**TFSR: There's definitely some people in the quote unquote anti imperialist left in other parts of the world that are saying that the territorial integrity of Russia and its border is being threatened by the de facto participation of Ukraine in the EU or relationship to the European Union or relationship to NATO, as if Ukraine is necessarily it's either a part of the Russian Federation in the restoration of historical Russia or historical Soviet Union of the Stalin era, or it is gobbled up and controlled as a puppet state by the European Union and and by NATO, by Western capitalist powers or imperialist powers. I'm sure a lot of our conversations going to sort of play with that idea and break it down. But can you talk about that idea, or how that relates to the the Maidan movement and the annexation of the Donbass and Crimea, and what what's happened in those territories?**

**Ilya:** Yes. So maybe first we can touch on this nationalist sentiment, which you mentioned previously. Because our peoples, Ukrainians and Russians are historically close and also linguistically and culturally close. It's also because of years of some imperialist role that there is widespread of usage of Russian language around here, especially eastern and southern parts of the country. They speak predominantly Russian. And this gives space for speculations that actually we are one people as, for example, Putin likes to speculate. And that there is some somehow historical reasons for our

so called “geopolitical integrity.” Which is, of course, just a propagandistic tool for some authoritarian power with some geopolitical ambitions to use these historical and cultural toys for their own benefit to make some speculative ground for their invasions.

So if we then jump to this problem of NATO and the EU, bringing Ukraine into their zone of influence by NATO and European Union. Of course, it’s really it really takes place, especially since 2014, because new authorities which came into power after the Maidan uprising. They were clearly pro-Western and it’s also hard to deny that a lot of locals have some pro-Western sentiment. Because for people in Eastern Europe, and in all post-Soviet nations, the Western world still creates a role model of lifestyle. I would say, because European Union is very close [geographically] and is not that culturally distant. And still they have this, how to say, nice and comfortable Western life. And many people think in our regions, not only in Ukrainian, Belarusian in Russia, as well, in every corner of post Soviet space... People dream about having a life like this. And this is also a matter to be used by some political manipulators of so called pro-Western orientation. And Ukraine is not excluded or even a bright example of that. However still, any expansion of NATO and European Union is actually superficial, because there were not really even any suggestions or proposals for the Ukraine to join these organizations.

So this, let’s say, very chimerical, artificial threat for Russian statehood is once again used as a tool to justify pressure and invasion. These attempts to make, as you said already, Ukraine [into] a puppet state for Putin’s regime, or to wage war, as we see today.

**TSFR: You’ve mentioned that there are more people in the east and the south who speak Russian, maybe are in the Orthodox Church, or, in some ways identify with Russia. Can you say a few words about the quote unquote People’s Republics in Donetsk and Luhansk. And their relationship to Russia. The Duma just asked Putin to recognize the independence of these states and he said that it was years late, that he should have done this before. But to your understanding, is there any truth that these are republics?**

**Ilya:** How to say... Ukrainian society is a very multi layered in the cultural aspects. So linguistic affiliations, as well as religious affiliations, they don’t necessarily at all construct some political loyalties, especially in terms like pro-Russian or pro-Western. Yes, southern and eastern regions, they are

**TFSR: : Yeah, and that, I mean, that makes absolute sense. When I think to something similar in the United States, like the Occupy movement, in some areas it was all sorts of different people coming for their own political reasons to be in that space because they had shared experience of misery under capitalism and alienation. And in some places, the Democratic Party was able to harness some of the energy. It definitely tried all over to either harness it or destroy it, if it couldn’t. And also, yeah, the relationship between the far right and and security forces is ubiquitous and international.**

**So, on the same topic, can you talk about the participation of groups like Azov battalion and fighting in the war in the Donbass that’s been happening since 2014, the training of far right foreigners and in paramilitary skills and the allowance of their existence in or alongside of the armed forces in in the Ukrainian military?**

**Ilya:** Oh, yes, Azov voluntary battalion was formed soon after Maidan and really was a Nazi initiative to intervene in this conflict in Donbass. Soon after, they became a regular regiment of Ukrainian army and somehow integrated within the military hierarchy. So, now, they are not clearly “political” because as a part of the army which, it must be declared to be apart from any politics. But of course, it was a Nazi-originated, Nazi-built structure, these people, these Nazis, still really have a core presence in there and leadership within it. I have no strict information, but I heard many rumors but from believable sources that yes, lots of Western Nazis came, and also Russian Nazis actually, even more Russian Nazis, they came here to participate in Azov and also to train. Yes, this really exists and not only Azov battalion, they organize their civil branch which is called a National Corps Party which intervenes actively in Ukrainian political life but is also is very much discredited because its affiliation with criminal activities and also affiliation with the Interior Ministry of former Interior Minister Avakov. And all this is called Azov Movement, which is a pretty far right movement even now, even though they’re now trying to play somehow that “we are not Nazis, we are not fascists, were just conservative nationalists.” But from origin, they’ve been Nazis. They are really in. Still I honestly honestly no information about any ethnic cleansing performed by them, surprisingly!

There are many Nazis here, for example, Dmitro Yarosh from Pravyi Sektor you mentioned, they originate, or many of National Corps. Dmitro Yarosh is from Dnipro city, and many of National Corps leaders,

**TFSR: So one of the conspiracy theories that has been promoted by authoritarians in the so called “anti imperialist left,” often not promoting leftist values on social justice, but often aligned with Russian regime and others viewed as being oppositional to the USA, has been that the Maidan movement was a CIA operation to promote the far-right groups such as Pravyi sektor or Svoboda into taking power in a bloodthirsty drive to ethnically cleanse Russians in the Donbass. Can you talk about this view of what happened or this view of the Ukrainian state or culture in terms of the far-right influence?**

**Ilya:** Yes, well as the good teacher of the authoritarian propaganda, Göbbels, said that if you want your lies to be believed in, you should use some kernels of truth in it. So yes, the far-right, had a strong presence in Maidan uprising, because they were organizing pretty well before it, like for four years before it. And it was also somehow affiliated with the authorities, with the secret services as far as we can estimate, and also with some criminal business and so on. Because of this, they faced this Maidan uprising on a pretty good footing, which gave them an opportunity to develop somehow their organizations within Maidan uprising and after it.

But still, in first approach, this is the lie that the Ukrainian far-right took more grounds for ethnic cleansing of the Russian speaking population, because there is still no actually ethical cleansing of this population. And also, really far-right nationalist parties are not even present in Parliament. Because, honestly, I don't give a lot of shit who is present in Parliament. But more important for me, when I participated in Maidan uprising, I saw by my own eyes 100,000s of just ordinary people, of grassroots people rebelling against the oligarchical rule, against their humiliation imposed by the uncontrollable criminal President Yanukovych. Of course, many powers tried to intervene and tried to influence this. Not only from the Right, it was Liberals, some fake opposition parties created by different local oligarch clans, which we already mentioned today. All of them tried their best to influence the movement. And I would say, oligarch Poroshenko, which became next president, was pretty successful in it. And we can say that Maidan is once again a betrayed revolution, like a revolution which was stolen from the people by the oligarchs. But the Maidan uprising itself was definitely less of a nationalist movement and much more of grassroots popular movement against the authorities, against the government. This I would say.

very much Russian speaking. But in no way at all does the majority of the people or even a considerable number of the people support the integration with Putinist Russia. No way! It's just not like this. Also the Orthodox Church here is separated into different factions. We have here both the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and also Ukrainian branch of Moscow Orthodox Church. This separation somehow influence the political loyalties, but also not totally. Even if a person is Russian speaking, and go into Ukrainian branch of Moscow Orthodox Church, it doesn't necessarily mean that this person is loyal to the Russian government. But still yes, in Crimea, and in eastern and southern regions, there are more sympathizers for Russian state and also for the Putinist regime. And for example, so called Oppositional Platform, the party which is still present present in Ukrainian parliament, holds clearly pro-Putin positions, and still mostly supported in southern and eastern areas. But by no way by the majority of the population.

So what I want to say briefly that a lot of people who speaks mostly Russian here, they still don't want to be integrated in some new Russian new empire, or to be subjugated by Putin's regime.

And about the political nature... Crimea is another story. A lot of people, I would say, actually associated themselves with Russia in this territory. But it is also far from being the social consensus in Crimea. For example, the indigenous people of Crimea, the Crimean Tatars, are a large part of the population and are really unhappy and disloyal to the so called new [Russian] authorities in Crimea. And they even try to resist it somehow. So there is also a split within Crimean community, I would say, would be correct to say.

About so called to popular Republic's, of course, they are not Republic's at all, they could never exist without direct support from the Russian state, both in economical conditions and more important by military conditions. So of course, we need to say that there is some support from the grassroots for this republic, but is not not even nearly enough to hold any anti-Ukrainian separatists insurgency. So this is not an authentic, separatist movement. Actually, this is totally orchestrated by Russian state and military. These are not republics at all. Actually, I would say, they're criminal quasi-states, ruled by some sort of mafias, which is called governments of this so called “republics.” And these mafias hold the power, since they are fully controlled and fully loyal and fully manipulated by Kremlin.

**TSFR:** In the past month, and particularly, it's been escalating, you've seen more than 100,000 Russian troops along the eastern border with Ukraine, the participation in impromptu drills and war games involving 10s of 1000s of aligned Belarusian troops to the north, naval deployments in the sea south of Ukraine, and the activation of troops in occupied Moldova. There have even been nuclear training exercises in recent days. And as I'm hearing, there's been shelling already in the Donbass, but I've heard that shelling has actually started in other parts of Ukraine, the parts that aren't occupied.

There's also this this issue that Western governments and the Ukrainian government saying Russia is going to do a "false flag" activity to claim a reason to do an invasion. And there was in fact, a car bomb of the head of security forces in one of the quote unquote People's Republics that Russia was claiming was a terrorist act and an activity by the Ukrainian government. I guess we've sort of already talked about how this is just Russian expansion.

Is there any sort of activity any sort of truth to these, what's been called false flag activities? Or or the claims of active genocide in the eastern part of the country against Russian speaking peoples, which the Putin administration regime has been using as an argument of why they needed to defend them?

**Ilya:** First of all, you're absolutely correct. Today, early morning, we got up because every parts of Ukraine were actually bombed by heavy airstrikes from the Russian side. As far as I can estimate up to now, their main targets were both civil and military airports, and also other military targets. But they bombed pretty near to the civilian inhabited places, and as far as I know, up to now dozens of civilians already killed by Putinist forces from the sky.

About your question... In no way do I want to whitewash the Ukrainian state. First of all, I would not call Ukrainian state "super nationalist", even though this is, of course, a classic nation state, actually, with all its obvious shortcomings. And also with some politics for ethnic and national unification, which is unjust, of course. So what else should be said about it? This is also very neoliberal and poor state, providing continuously and extensively neoliberal reforms which are reducing social help and safety for the working people, for the poor people of this country. And some nationalist sentiment, of course, is present in this society. Some people believe that people here should speak only Ukrainian language,

really competing oligarch clans struggling for power and for bigger zones of economical and political influence.

You're absolutely correct. Maidan uprising had a lot of anti-oligarchical intention, because this oligarchy rule is really something which makes this country very poor and vulnerable. At the same time, surprisingly, both countries are absolutely neoliberal. Even though Putin has some social populism, year after year for decades now already, he has provided neoliberal reforms. And also, the strengthening social vulnerability of the working people of the ordinary people. And the Ukrainian society is still much less state controlled. That is an important point. The Ukrainian state is not better than other states. But it just has much less tools to control and to subjugate its own population. This is still somehow pluralistic, absolutely unlike the Russian situation. And I would say there is still a much more free atmosphere around here. This is not a coincidence that, for example, many comrades from Russia and Belarus they find shelter exactly here. Because much less political repression and state violence is present here. So here, we still see a lot of grounds for making some grassroots initiatives, direct democracy projects, and any, I would say, even social revolutionary developments. While in Russia, we see just this authoritarian hammer, I would say, which smashes everything which it meets in its way. So this is one of the big reasons why it needs to be confronted. The Ukrainian state has a lot of disadvantages. But the Ukrainian society really should be protected from this totalitarian threat that it faces today and that it has actually faced already for decades, since Putinist expansionist politics are starting to be implemented.

So this is exactly our reason, or why to participate in it. We believe in radical social changes within Ukrainian society. But for this, exactly for this, and not for protecting some state sovereignty, which doesn't make sense for us. Exactly for the possibility for positive social changes should the Putinist invasions should be severely confronted. And I would say that this is the moment of truth, because in worse situations the grassroots very often is killed off. And self-organization, solidarity, mutual aid really take ground within the population, especially when elites betray the population. Several days before the invasions, many politicians of Ukraine, they just flew away on their private jets. So we see pretty clearly that the state is not a friend at all for the Ukrainian people. So this is our fight! Our fight is for the people is for protecting the grounds for the future revolutionary changes, which is now being deadly threatened by the Putinist threat.



**resentation. And maybe it actually is antivax overall, in similar conspiracy-theory-ways that we have in the West too, but is that is there any truth to that? What do you think was motivating the antivax movement in Russia?**

**Ilya:** Well, I think there is actually a lot of how to say, this so called COVID skepticism, and a little bit of being skeptical about medicine, as well as which we can treat as some sort of ignorance which actually exists within the population. But at the same time, another portion of this antivax motivation, which may differ from what we have in the West, but I'm maybe mistaken, is that Russian population highly doesn't believe the authorities, it doesn't believe that any good will come from above. They want to resist any invasion of the state programs within their private lives, because they know that the write a lot of lies, going from TV channels, and from the heights persons of the state. They have experienced many tricks from there and because of that they just don't believe the authorities. And this was one of the factors for why antivax sentiments blossomed in in Russia.

**TSFR:** So as I understood, the Maidan protests, in part were a push against the rule by Ukrainian oligarchs, although maybe it was in favor of some oligarchs over others. And they had vast control, in many ways parallel to the Russian oligarchs, who Putin rules alongside. Some people, at least, who are arguing against the Russian invasion are positing it as supporting Ukraine, you've already laid a critique that it's a poor neoliberal state, a capitalist state. Can you can you talk a little bit more breaking apart these ideas of being against the invasion and in favor of self-defense of the population versus supporting Ukraine as a political project or state?

**Ilya:** Yes, I do it with pleasure, actually, because this is, I believe the most important point.

But first of all, some preliminary words. Actually, the Russian system and Ukrainian systems are very different because all the Russian oligarchs are more or less subjugated to this unified authoritarian rule of Putin and his clique, which originates more in former Soviet secret services of which Putin is a former member of. So this is a pretty unified model of control from one center, which is this, we call "Silovic." I know that even in the West, this word is in usage now, like with this secret services set as the political center. Now in Ukraine situation is another there, there is

because the Russian language was absolutely the colonizer's language. But this is, of course, nonsense, from my point of view, because millions of Ukrainians prefer Russian language. All this creates splits within this society, and creates tensions and create a space for some political advances of certain political forces.

But of course, there is no ethnic cleansing, there is no genocide. This is absolutely over-exaggeration, which is used consciously by Russian forces, by Putinist forces, I would prefer to say, to play this card of military invasion and of their political expansion. There is no, how to say, forcing people to speak another language, for example, and there is no really repression and violence against people who may not fit well into Ukrainian nation state frame. There are certain problems, of course, but what we see today, is just an attempt to over-exaggerate all the problems and to instrumentalize these problems for clearly imperialist aggression. Just now curfew is declared in Kiev from 10pm, but we still have a lot of time before it. Okay?

**TSFR:** Okay. So we see, I mean, with with the air raids, with the bombings that are happening, it's clear that Russia is not just about saber-rattling, which a lot of people were proposing beforehand... that it was more about getting international attention and proving itself that it can destabilize the Ukrainian economy and bring a lot of other world powers to the table. This was kind of an assumption of Putin's logic. But at this point, obviously, it's it's more than that. A lot of people were saying beforehand that it didn't seem likely that the Russian regime would end up invading because the military force that they could muster probably wouldn't be enough to actually occupy Ukraine. Between all of the aid that's been coming internationally, the buildup of NATO and US troops and neighboring countries, the training of the Ukrainian population in Civil Defense forces that seem to be preparing for the possibility of guerrilla warfare against an occupation... But all of that aside, Russia's doing what it's doing right now.

**Did trying to figure out what was going on with the Russian administration and where their decision making was.. was that helpful, do you think or was that kind of a distraction, to actually preparing for the real possibility of what we're seeing now?**

**Ilya:** Well, if I understood your question correctly, I would think that the Russian government... I am far from thinking that they are like stupid or

crazy or something, but somehow they are really going wild. Because they feel that they are somehow facing the final battle now. They have lost popularity within Russia actually, and they need some more doping, I would say, to make it increase again, internal popularity. They also feel that the so-called “international community” is actually a weak and fragmented and they try to use these holes within the international community, and with this world establishment consensus, to make some game change and to provide their authoritarian interests. I think we can compare it fairly well with the behavior of Turkish state, which has their own, let’s say, “popular republics” in Syria, for example, and also extending their influence abroad its borders. So I think these two new imperialist states, they make actually very similar politics.

So for me, it seems that they understand... And also we need to do remember that since 2014, when European sanctions were imposed, the economical situation in Russia has been worsening from year to year, which also contributes to a growing unpopularity of this regime, in Russian minds, I would say. Because of this, I think that the Russian authorities feel themselves still very powerful, and they are actually, but at the same time they feel themselves a little bit like in the “Ragnarok” film, like in some final battle for them to protect their privileged position and their full control over the country and abroad. And that is the reason why I think they play such wild games, both inside Russia and abroad.

**TSFR: Are you aware of anti militarist opposition inside of the Russian Federation, like this building conflict has been simultaneous to Russia aiding suppression in Belarus by Lukashenko as well as putting down the Kazakh unrest?**

**Ilya:** Oh, yes, I am. I know that a lot of people in Russia don’t like war at all. I know this, I’m pretty sure about this. This is obvious for me. At the same time, you need to know that all political opposition, from liberal, far right, and anarchist and leftist side were extensively smashed during the last year’s. For example, you probably heard, even in the the US about the so called “Network Case” against Russian anarchists, and a lot of different cases like this were going on. So they also killed opposition leaders, like Liberal leader Boris Nemtsov, they have imprisoned Alexei Navalny, who is one of the biggest populist liberal leaders in Russian opposition.

So they did work well to destroy all the opposition forces. Since 2011, we had several sparks, I would say, sparks of a resistance, of real-

ly broad protest movements. But they didn’t succeed finally, they were more or less co-opted or smashed by the state or they just died because time passed away and they still gained no results. And after each of these sparks, the government use their opportunity to suppress more and more the opposition. One big last increase of the protests we saw last winter in January 2021 when this populist Navalny returned to Russia and many of his supporters. But also even more of just people unhappy with the situation in the country, they really came to the streets in many, many Russian cities to protest Putin’s politics. But they are all were suppressed. And then repressions became even harder and dozens of people were imprisoned. So now human rights defenders, speak about at least of 1,000 political prisoners in Russia. And we need to know that actually, there are many more because human rights defenders, they do not recognize all the people who are being imprisoned for their political activities.

Because of this now, there are a lot of unhappiness with this war in Russia, but there is no organizational tools, some movement tools, which could mobilize the people of Russia to protest against it. We already saw today, several separate actions against the invasion and against the war in Russia in different cities of Russia, but it’s still not a massive and organized movement. For example, we see no big demonstrations, as far as I know. I still hope to see them and maybe if war continues it will happen. But up to up today, it doesn’t exist, because this government made conscious work to destroy an internal opposition. But still for example, it is interesting that when Coronavirus, vaccination started, this anti-vax movement, they gained also big grounds in Russian society. And authorities even had to go several steps back with this vaccination and certifications programs. You hardly expect from Putin and from Russian authorities to have to go any steps back, but at that time they had to because they really saw a large unhappiness growing within the population. So I’m still far from thinking they are almighty, even internally, not at all. There is some, how to say, some ghosts of protest and revolutionary movement within Russia, which still didn’t take its forms. But it definitely is present. It definitely exists. And this is one of the factors which is making the Putinist government wild enough to make such initiatives, let’s say, as they are today.

**TSFR: I kind of a side note, and a question that I have in relation to COVID in Russia is.. In the West, media has represented a lot of protests around COVID to be around a distrust of the quality of the shots that the Russian government was making. And maybe that’s a misrep-**