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Open Letter on the Withdrawal from the Teach-In on Ukraine

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With great sadness, Daria Serenko (Feminist Anti-war resistance) and I have decided not to participate in the discussion organized by Creative Time and Vera List Center “Teach-in on Ukraine for Artists and Activists”. We want to thank Larissa Babji, Nikita Kadan, and Mykola Ridnyi for their willingness to take part in this event together with us.

After spreading information about the event on social media, Daria and I both received a lot of angry messages. The accusation was that Western experts and Russian activists would have nothing to teach about the war in Ukraine, and that especially the Russians should give their places to Ukrainian speakers in light of the current situation.

Of course, neither Daria nor I can teach anybody anything about Ukraine – just opposite, we were invited modestly to talk about the situation around anti-war protests in Russia and to show solidarity with the Ukrainian struggle. We totally respect and understand the anger of anyone who is demanding a total and undifferentiated boycott of Russian voices in any context. There are no nuances in class war, as we used to say.

Those in Russia who have resisted the local fascist regime from the very beginning and have not received anything from it except repression, we do not need to be celebrated.

It is our privilege that we never had to speak from the position of nation, force, militarization, and violent struggle. This has never been our language of resistance. We have always spoken from the position of weakness, vulnerability and care that today is shared by all protesters in Russia and Belarus, facing draconic wartime legislation We will continue our anti-war campaigns in all possible forms.

Today’s growing movement against the war and the fascist regime continues an age-old struggle in Russia against autocracy and colonialism. We are proud to belong to this tradition which the current regime is trying to silence and erase.

There is an old Polish slogan: For our freedom and yours (Za naszą i waszą wolność). It was first seen in 1831 at a patriotic demonstration in Warsaw, held to commemorate the Russian Decembrists. In partitioned Poland, it meant that a Polish victory would also mean liberty for the peoples of Russia–fellow inmates in that “prison house of the peoples.” The slogan made it clear: the Polish struggle for self-determination and nationhood was aimed not at the Russian people but at tsarist despotism. It was also a call to action. To be freed from serfdom at the arbitrary hands of oligarchs and bureaucrats, Russians would have to topple the regime that expands into other countries and colonizes them. This common history of struggle against Russian imperial autocracy has a colossal meaning to all “real” Russian culture–and not the one we are now “learning” about from Putin and his cronies.

Today, what we need most are discussions based on mutual respect and solidarity. We cannot participate in discussions where all Russians and everything Russian is considered as a culture of

oppression and colonization. We respect this view of Ukrainian patriots at a time of fascist war, in light of all the regime’s atrocities. But we cannot agree. Silencing our common history and our emancipatory heritage is exactly what Putin is doing. Please do not help him.

Nevertheless, we support your fight; it is our fight as well. We still believe that this war is not Russia’s war, but that of PutinZ and his regime and we are grateful to you for this chance to formulate and advocate this position.

Glory to Ukraine, glory to the people of Belarus and Russia who resist, glory to anyone who does their best to stop the war and care about life not death!

https://chtodelat.org/b5-announcements/a-6/open-letter-on-the-withdrawal-from-the-teach-in-on-ukraine-by-dmitry-vilensky/?fbclid=IwAR33VMtYGEwTCRkKV_FeqUlo6SKjF5bQacpHX1Kn02U5-hCqZGeuP1UH2vc