

BREST-LITOVSK AND AFTER



by Ralph Berry

You have to hand it to the paladins of the press. Nothing daunts them. Ukraine is devastated, millions of its people are forced into exile whence many will never return, no end to the war is in sight.

Yet the media urge on the combatants. Fraser Nelson, editor of the *SPECTATOR*, writes that 'a fight is on for democracy [whose?] and that it is in a very real sense, a shared battle.' No, it isn't. A man in Nelson's position should know that 'in a very real sense' is a mocking, satirist's term that belongs to *PRIVATE EYE*. Nelson has signed up to the Establishment line that nothing other than total victory for Ukraine is acceptable, whatever the cost to the Ukrainians. Talk of 'negotiations' only weakens their will. Even Henry Kissinger, for suggesting that the Ukrainians will have to

give up land for peace, is reproved in the *TIMES* for 'cynicism'. Other columnists, like the normally sensible Simon Heffer are all against negotiations. The chateaux media are safe in their principled stance behind the barricades of Western security.

Hostilities began with a Schlieffen Plan for a knockout attack on Kiev and a short war. Like its original, the plan failed. Russia is now set on a long war: Vladimir Putin says so and Secretary-General Stoltenberg of NATO agrees. Michael Fallon, a past Defence Secretary of the UK, has this curious but typical logic. It is necessary 'to end this war as quickly as possible: that means doing everything we can to make sure that Ukraine wins it.' So, the more weaponry we send to Ukraine, the longer the conflict. And if Ukraine cannot win any time soon, or at all, what then? Fallon ends with this rousing peroration:

'Stopping Putin once and for all is the surest way of ensuring that the villages of south-eastern Poland –and the rest of us–stay safe.'

It also ensures that the villages of South-Eastern Ukraine, and elsewhere, are unlikely to be safe if anywhere near infrastructure such as power stations. They are the vulnerable targets in the drone war. President Biden promises that they will be guarded by the latest defence system, the Patriot. Against that the Russians will deploy swarms of cheapo missiles—they have just bought 6,000 from Iran—some of which will get through. We don't have to think about those that fail to get through. All it costs the Russians is money, which a sovereign state with its own currency can always afford. No doubt the Iranians are working to improve the missiles they have got. They are said to be building a drone factory in Tatarstan.

What then of the unconquerable will of the Ukrainian people? 'There's little doubt that the Ukrainians have the will and

the determination to fight until their country has been entirely liberated' says another columnist.

Really? It can be seriously argued that the decisive factor in the collapse of Germany in the later stages of the First World War was the Royal Navy. Their merciless blockade caused the civilian population great hardship, which was fully realized by their menfolk at the front. Norman Stone recounts a telling incident: the Kaiser, at the headquarters town of Spa in Belgium (18 July), asked Ludendorff what had gone wrong, and Ludendorff said that the men were just not fighting any more. Thousands were surrendering. Nothing like that can be looked for in Ukraine, but it remains a fact that the numbers of Ukrainian fighters are diminished daily, while the Russians have the services of the Wagner group. They have outsourced much of the fighting to the shadowy Wagner mercenaries, who are now recruiting female prisoners to act as snipers and nurses in the war zone.

Russian women had a fearsome reputation as snipers in WW2. The point is that they and the Ukrainian fighters are not humanly co-equal.

The costs of the war bear increasingly upon the Western supporters of the Ukraine. President Biden has promised US backing through 2023, meaning that Ukraine will have to get a result by the year's end.

Rishi Sunak has ordered a cost-benefit analysis of Britain's support (answer, of course, we can't, since the UK's defence budget is being savagely cut). With a US recession looming, the world is coming to grasp that they cannot afford to back other people's wars. Hence the agitated appearance of Zelensky in Washington in his regular uniform pleading for more weapons, weapons, weapons. The words of Mr Benet come to mind: 'You have delighted us long enough.' However much he opposes a settlement, he is being forced to sit at the long table—at the other end of which is Vladimir Putin.

But what is it that the chorus of Western liberals want of Russia?

Can they really see a humiliated, defeated Russia sent out of the room where the civilized nations congregate? Something like this has happened before. In March 1918 Russia accepted a peace of surrender at Brest-Litovsk in Poland (now Belarus). It was signed off by Lenin and Trotsky, who knew that continuing the war was impossible. The terms of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk have echoes today. The Baltic States, Poland, Finland, Belarus, most of Ukraine became independent.

They have since re-confirmed their independence from Russia: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, Sweden are members of NATO.

Ukraine, having at the onset of the current war denied any ambition to join NATO, now demands entry. There is no chance of NATO allowing an inflamed, demanding Ukraine to dominate the policies of a successful alliance. Brest-Litovsk brought about what A.J.P. Taylor called 'the freak period when neither Russia nor Germany counted as great powers'.

It did not last, and it did not end well.