U.S. Still Buying Russian Uranium in Spite of War on Ukraine

By Bob Mayberry

It’s ironic to contemplate, devastating to realize, that while the U.S. has banned Russian oil, coal, and gas imports, we continue to buy uranium for our nuclear reactors from Moscow. How much are we spending on reactor fuel? Estimates differ wildly. Senator John Barrasso, R-Wyo., claims that the U.S. is “underwriting Putin’s war machine” to the tune of $100 million a month. But Sen. Barrasso has reason to exaggerate since uranium mining revenues in his state might increase following a ban on Russian imports.

The Washington Post reported that International Trade Commission figures for 2016 show the U.S. spending just over $1 billion on Russian uranium, but that figure shrank to $568 million in 2020. However, even those figures aren’t certain. Past reporter Glenn Kessler located a Senate Energy Committee webpage showing sales to the U.S. from Rosatom, Russia’s state-owned nuclear power company, totaled $784 million in 2020. Clearly the U.S. is spending between five hundred million and a billion dollars annually on Russian uranium. Interestingly, Rosatom was founded by Vladimir Putin in 2007. And, according to The Verge, it now produces 20% of the world’s reactor fuel.

According to Reuters, the U.S. relies on Russia, and its allies Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, for roughly half of the uranium used to fuel its 93 reactors. Those units are responsible for nearly 20% of U.S. electricity. The Biden administration exempted uranium from the bans on Russian imports in part to keep electricity prices low.

Meanwhile, Sen. Barrasso and others are lobbying to add uranium to the Russian import ban, while simultaneously trying to kick-start uranium mining in states like Wyoming, Utah, Texas and Arizona, where large reserves are found. Uranium mining was largely abandoned in the U.S. due to the dangers of radioactive pollution. Thousands of abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation in Arizona have led to high levels of radioactive metals in the bodies of the women living on the reservation, according to a recent report from the University of New Mexico’s Navajo Birth cohort Study.

While Sen. Barrasso and others call for renewed uranium mining, Native Americans demand long-overdue cleanup of abandoned mines, mills, and mountains of tailings scattered across the western U.S. that continue to emit dangerous radiation and contaminate water on Indigenous lands.

Transitioning to renewable energy would avoid uranium imports and cut toxic and radioactive pollution.

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We Need an International Antiwar Movement, and Not Cheerleaders for the Weapons Industry

By Ron Jacobs

A ceasefire between the warring parties, a Russian withdrawal, a halt to arms shipments, a negotiation peace, and an end to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This is what the international left should be organizing in regard to the Russia-Ukraine war. It shouldn’t be calling for stepping up arms shipments to Ukraine’s military or defending Moscow’s invasion. When this war is stopped, the most likely situation for the vast majority of Ukrainian working people will be one where their greatest enemy could well be the Ukrainian government. Likewise, if the war goes on long enough, the greatest enemy of the vast majority of Russian working people could well be their government. The oligarchs in both nations will still be oligarchs, while the Russian and Ukrainian people will bear the human, financial and other costs of the war.

If the reader thinks the current conflict will somehow end with a different outcome, they need to revisit the history of war, especially war of the modern kind. You know, where civilian populations are bombed, conscripts are forced to kill and die in the thousands; where international bankers make loans to all sides until the battle begins. All the while general politicians and intellectuals talk nonsense about the principles being defended as if most of them had any principles that couldn’t be purchased.

It’s becoming clearer to more and more people that this war is truly a proxy war and that Ukrainians are being sacrificed by their government. Neither position (including the government in Kyiv) while Russians are being targeted as the enemy of the vast majority of the people under fire.

My response to the charge of escalating the war will be Nina Jankowicz, who (I quote the DHEP press release) “advised the Ukrainian government on strategic communications.” (https://www.holiday.us/feder-al-pages/dhs/dhs-stan-ding-up-disinformation-oversight-board-led-by-information-warfare-expert/)

In other words, Jankowicz advocated on how to write and spread propaganda. She is now taking her scriptwriting to the U.S. public. One assumes she will be working with various manipulators of public opinion in the broadcast, print and social media fields. One can be certain that she will maintain and intensify the stories about Kyiv, Moscow, Washington and NATO already saturating the U.S. and much of Europe.

In recent days, I have been accused (along with what one so-called socialist writer dismisses as the “left and justice crowd”) of supporting war because I am against the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and think the political Left should be organizing a non-aligned international antiwar movement, not joining the cheerleading squad for NATO and its arms shipments.

My response to the charge is simple. To claim that escalating the war will prevent a longer war is just nonsense. It can already be argued that the escalation has already extended the very few actual wars end when a war escalates. In fact, escalation extends the conflict and the horror that involves. It seems to me that the people who really care about the people under fire are those calling for a ceasefire and negotiations, not those cheering the arms shipments. By rejecting the call that begins this piece, one is rejecting the only internationalist response to this conflict. In refusing this call, one is accepting a binary choice that means more war, no matter which side one chooses. That choice is one defined by the militaries doing the fighting and the rulers pulling their strings. Making this binary choice is not making a choice for peace or even the consideration of peace. Plain and simple, it is choosing more war.

Ron Jacobs is the author of Daydream Sunset: Sixties Counterculture in the Seventies published by CounterPunch Books. His latest offering is a pamphlet titled "Capitalism: Is the Problem." He lives in Vermont and wrote this piece for CounterPunch.