

The Ukrainian election and the demise of the “Orange Revolution”

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The crushing defeat of Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine’s presidential poll in January and the election of Viktor Yanukovich in the second round vote held February 7 mark the ignominious end of the 2004 “Orange Revolution.”

After five years of “Orange” rule, the majority of the people are worse off, while the oligarchic clans and politicians continue to go about their business with the same level of corruption and criminality as before.

The debacle for the Western-backed leaders who came to power in 2004 continued this week with the collapse of the coalition in the Ukrainian parliament led by Yulia Timoshenko, the current prime minister and former co-leader of the “Orange Revolution.”

A vote of no confidence is due to be held today, with Timoshenko almost certain to lose her post as prime minister. Timoshenko has lost the support of more than the Ukrainian parliament, however. She has lost, more importantly, the backing of Washington, which supported her during the “Orange Revolution,” as well as the European powers and Russia, which are focused on pressuring the new Yanukovich administration into imposing austerity measures in the country.

It is for this reason that the “international community” ignored Timoshenko’s claims of fraud by Yanukovich in this year’s election, forcing her to drop her legal challenge to the vote. In 2004, similar claims by Timoshenko and Yushchenko were championed by the US and the Western European powers to overturn the initial vote, officially won by Yanukovich, and force a new election in which the “Orange” leaders emerged victorious.

At that time, the US and the Western media hailed Yushchenko and Timoshenko as “democrats” at the head of a popular revolution. This was a fraud. Washington funded and helped organize the groups that

led protests in Kiev against the alleged theft of the initial vote by Yanukovich, an ally of Russia, in order to install a pro-US regime that would open the country up to American capital and line up behind US moves to supplant Moscow in Russia’s traditional spheres of influence.

Much of Russia’s natural gas exports flow through Ukraine en route to Western Europe, and the Russian Navy’s Black Sea Fleet is based in the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol.

Both Yushchenko and Timoshenko had held posts in the outgoing government of Leonid Kuchma. They represented disaffected sections of Ukrainian oligarchs who wanted to oust their political and business rivals from power in order to further enrich themselves.

Yushchenko has been an integral part of post-Soviet Ukrainian politics, having been head of the country’s central bank before being appointed prime minister in 1999. Yushchenko developed his “democratic” opposition to the Kuchma regime only after he fell out of favor and was deposed as prime minister in 2001, to be replaced by Yanukovich.

Yanukovich is a long-time political agent of oligarchs from Ukraine’s industrial Donetsk region. His bid to take over from Kuchma in 2004 was backed by the Kremlin.

Timoshenko had a similar, but more lucrative, role in the post-Soviet orgy of self-enrichment. She and her husband made a vast fortune from the export of natural gas during the 1990s. Kuchma appointed her as Yushchenko’s deputy prime minister in 1999. Losing office with Yushchenko, the pair established a tentative alliance, recasting themselves as opponents of Kuchma and Yanukovich.

Relying on anti-Russian demagoguery and Ukrainian chauvinism to win support from more rural areas in the

west of Ukraine, their campaigns in 2002 for parliament and Yushchenko's 2004 bid for the presidency also tapped into opposition, especially among young people, to official corruption.

The installation of Yushchenko and Timoshenko in Ukraine was one of a series of so-called "color revolutions" orchestrated by US imperialism. Washington modeled its intervention in Ukraine on the previous year's palace coup in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, the so-called "Rose Revolution."

As in Ukraine, the "color revolution" in Georgia has produced a despised, unstable and antidemocratic regime. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili has used violent repression against his political opponents, launched a reckless and disastrous war against Russia, and is mired in corruption.

The liquidation of the USSR was the final betrayal of Stalinism, and its results have proven in the negative that the only basis for a progressive social, economic and democratic development lay in the gains of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and its extension on an international scale. With the breakup of the USSR, Ukraine, Georgia and the other former Soviet republics have descended to the status of virtual economic colonies of one or more of the major powers.

The orange- and rose-themed coups in Ukraine and Georgia were episodes in Washington's attempt to reshape the former Soviet region in its interests. However, reflecting the decline in the global position of American imperialism, and, in particular, its military quagmire in Afghanistan, Washington has had to limit its ambitions in the region for now.

The Obama administration has conceded to Moscow that it will not actively pursue the expansion of its main military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to include Georgia and Ukraine, in exchange for Moscow's limited support for the US-led war in Afghanistan and plans for a new set of sanctions against Iran.

The major European powers, especially Germany, have welcomed the halt to NATO expansion, which they saw as too destabilizing to their relations to Russia. They see Ukraine as a source of profits from its energy and metallurgical industries, to be shared, if necessary, with Moscow.

Reflecting this balance of forces, Yanukovich's first foreign visit was to leaders of the European Union in

Brussels. Only after that did he fly to Moscow for talks in the Kremlin.

Yanukovich's backers see Ukraine as a cheap labor platform for European capital. The new president is prepared to deepen the attacks on the Ukrainian working class' living standards in order to meet the demands of the EU bureaucrats and international investors.

The claims of the Ukrainian and Western media that, whatever the failings of the Yushchenko administration, the lasting legacy of the "Orange Revolution" is a strengthening of democratic institutions are bogus. To impose the dictates of the international banks on the Ukrainian working class, Yanukovich and whoever holds the post of prime minister will resort to ever more undemocratic methods of rule.

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