

As riots spread, right-wing Ukrainian opposition threatens new clashes

Alex Lantier
24 January 2014

After meeting with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich yesterday, leaders of the right-wing, Western-backed opposition threatened to step up violent protests, as pro-opposition rioters took over state buildings in several cities in western Ukraine.

Protesters occupying Independence Square in the capital, Kiev, observed a truce with police. Before the meeting, Yanukovich issued a statement declaring that he would consider rescinding a recently passed, anti-democratic law banning protests and calling for an emergency session of the Ukrainian parliament on January 28 to discuss the crisis. He added that he might consider new parliamentary elections, sacking the government of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov.

Orthodox priests also appeared on the square, reportedly in an attempt to calm the opposition protesters, chanting for the “removal from Ukraine of ungodly power.”

This reflected rising concern, among both the Ukrainian oligarchs backing Yanukovich and the imperialist powers backing the opposition, of the protests escalating out of control. Violent clashes between police and protesters left five protesters dead on Wednesday. Earlier this week, opposition leaders like Vitali Klitschko of the Udar Party and Arseniy Yatsenyuk of the Fatherland Party had called for peaceful protests and presidential elections in February 2015.

While Klitschko, Yatsenyuk, and Oleg Tyagnibok of the ultra-right Svoboda Party were in talks with Yanukovich, however, protests spread from Kiev to Lviv, Rivne, and other cities in the west of the country, where support for the opposition is strongest.

In Lviv, approximately 1,000 protesters stormed the regional administration building and declared that a so-called “People’s Assembly” was now ruling inside it. A letter was issued, signed by Lviv governor Oleg Salo, announcing his resignation. He later retracted it, however, saying he had been coerced.

Hundreds of protesters attacked the governor’s office in Rivne, breaking windows and doors, chanting “Down with the gang,” and singing the national anthem once they were inside.

There were further unconfirmed reports of attacks on government buildings in Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, and Ivano-Frankivsk. A few hundred protesters were reportedly defeated in an attempt to storm state buildings in Cherkassy.

When the three opposition leaders emerged from talks with Yanukovich in Kiev, their attempts to call for calm were roundly rejected. A small hard core of members of fascistic groups like Right Sector and Svoboda, whose leader Tyagnibok is infamous for his anti-Semitism, now make up the bulk of the forces fighting police in Kiev.

Far-right protesters reportedly booed and jeered Klitschko’s comments, calling for a more decisive attack on state forces. “We should not let ourselves be put off this way,” one protester told German news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

The opposition leaders left, then returned to the square and issued more demands, apparently in an attempt to control the fascistic forces they and their Western backers have unleashed. They demanded that Yanukovich step down and call early elections, without which they would call for an escalation of violent protests.

“Tomorrow, if the president won’t listen to us, we will go into attack. There is no other way,” said Klitschko. He warned that he feared a “bloodbath,” adding: “I fear there will be deaths, I really fear that.”

“Tomorrow we will go forward,” said Yatsenyuk. “If there will be a bullet in the forehead, so be it. It will be an honest, just, and brave action.”

Speaking at the Davos economic summit, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov branded the opposition protests as an attempted coup: “All those who support this coup should say clearly, ‘Yes, we are for the overthrow

of the legitimate authorities in Ukraine,' and not hide behind peaceful protesters ... A genuine attempt at a coup d'état is being carried." He said, however, that his government would step down if asked by parliament.

The most bellicose comments came from ultra-right groups speaking to Radio Free Europe (RFE), the radio station set up by Washington to spread anti-Soviet propaganda in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. RFE interviewed Andrei Tarasenko, the coordinator of the Right Sector group, who threatened that a further police confrontation with protesters would lead to civil war.

"If they attack and try to carry out a bloody crackdown, I think there will be a massacre. Guerrilla warfare will begin in Ukraine," Tarasenko told RFE. "Yanukovich must resign. People are ready to do anything for this to happen."

According to RFE, Right Sector is mobilizing forces through the VKontakte social networking site and organizing donations of items including slingshots, steel balls, gasoline, laser pointers, glass bottles, chains, and pyrotechnics to attack police.

Tarasenko's comments underscore that the opposition and its Western backers, who entered into the protests demanding the integration of the Ukraine into the European Union (EU) on the basis of deep austerity measures, have pushed the country to the brink of civil war.

The opposition, rooted in the forces that carried out the US-backed "Orange Revolution" against Yanukovich in 2004, has a certain base of support in western Ukraine. It faces deep popular opposition in Ukraine's industrial heartlands in the east, however.

The *Los Angeles Times* cited anonymous US officials who "worry that more violence, and a breakdown of civil order, could lie ahead."

Western officials played the central role in escalating the anti-government protests. Despite their far-right character, US and EU officials, including US Senator John McCain and EU Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Elmar Brok, provocatively traveled to Kiev to support and publicly endorse them.

The ability of the Western powers to destabilize the Ukraine reflects the historic bankruptcy of the oligarchic regime that emerged from the Stalinist liquidation of the USSR, in which the working class has no role in public life whatsoever. This leaves Ukraine, the poorest country in Europe, at the mercy of manipulation and intervention by the EU and the United States.

Having backed away at the last minute from a deal he

had negotiated to enter the EU based on deep attacks on the working class, Yanukovich's attempts to brutally repress protests inflamed broader layers of the population and brought them into the streets. Even now, however, when the protests have shrunk back to a small base of a few thousand largely fascistic elements, the Western powers are using them to press for concessions.

US Vice President Joe Biden called Yanukovich yesterday to discuss the situation in Ukraine. According to a brief statement posted on the White House web site, Biden called "to urge an immediate de-escalation in the standoff between protesters and security forces in downtown Kyiv... The Vice President underscored that only the government of Ukraine can ensure a peaceful end to the crisis, and further bloodshed would have consequences for Ukraine's relationship with the United States."

Laying blame for the violence purely on the side of the Yanukovich regime, White House spokesman Jay Carney ludicrously claimed, "The opposition movement here was a nonviolent movement and adopted those principles."

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton issued a statement also calling for more concessions to the far-right opposition and a greater role for it in the political establishment: "It is imperative to avoid further worsening of the situation and to pave the way for a genuine dialogue between the authorities, the opposition and civil society. Only an inclusive dialogue offers a viable way forward."



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact