

Coup in Ukraine: A warning to the international working class

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The recent events in Ukraine are a warning to the international working class. Under conditions in which workers lack both a perspective and a party to enable them to intervene independently in political events, the situation in Ukraine has developed in an extremely reactionary direction. What had been unthinkable in Europe since the fall of Hitler's Third Reich in 1945 has come to pass: while the US and Germany ruthlessly and recklessly destabilized the country, fascists became the decisive force on the ground.

The crisis was sparked in November of last year by President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. This was unacceptable for Washington and Berlin. As Theo Sommer put it in *Die Zeit*, the issue at stake was "Where should the EU's eastern boundary, and the western boundary of the Russian sphere of influence, be situated?"

The US and Germany systematically supported the pro-EU opposition, which organized the demonstrations against Yanukovych. In addition to Yulia Tymoshenko's Fatherland and Vitali Klitschko's UDAR—two right-wing parties with close ties to the German CDU—the opposition also included the fascist Svoboda party of Oleh Tyahnybok.

The fact that Svoboda employs neo-fascist symbols, agitates against foreigners, Jews, Hungarians and Poles, maintains close relations with the French National Front and is compared to the ultra-right Greek Golden Dawn and Hungarian Jobbik by the World Jewish Congress, has not prevented the foreign ministers of the United States and Germany from publicly embracing Tyahnybok.

The initial opposition demonstrations, however, failed to force Yanukovych to resign. At this point, paramilitary fascist militias were mobilized to intensify

the conflict and propel the country to the brink of civil war. The leading role was played by the so-called Right Sector, whose masked militants, equipped with helmets, batons, fire bombs and firearms soon dominated the center of Kiev, carrying out fierce attacks on the security forces. News reports estimate their number in Kiev alone to be between 2,000 and 3,000.

The conservative *Die Welt* paper termed the Right Sector an "informal association of right-wing and neo-fascist splinter groups". *Time* magazine, which interviewed its leader Dmitry Yarosh, writes that their "ideology borders on fascism and it enjoys support only from Ukraine's most hard-line nationalists". Many of its members are former soldiers or fought in the conflict on the side of Azerbaijan, and in Chechnya and South Ossetia against Russia.

It was these paramilitary fascist militias which ensured that the situation escalated last Thursday. While they fought bloody battles with the security forces, resulting in dozens of casualties on both sides, the German, Polish and French foreign ministers flew into Kiev and forced Yanukovych to accept a "compromise" following hours of negotiations. It was the beginning of the end for the president.

When the Right Sector spoke out against the agreement and threatened to resume hostilities, the military declared its neutrality, and many deputies from Yanukovych's Party of the Regions changed sides. This sealed his fate.

The situation in Ukraine is still extremely tense and unstable. The various camps of the opposition are fighting for political dominance, while there is the danger of secession and civil war in Crimea and the east of the country. The fascist forces upon which the Western powers and the opposition relied to force

through regime change are demanding their pound of flesh and will play an important role in the political life of the country.

When she spoke at Independence Square after her release from prison, former prime minister and Fatherland party leader Yulia Tymoshenko made a series of overtures to the fascist militias. She expressly thanked Right Sector for its “contribution to the revolution.” The new interior minister promised that the “Self-Defense Forces from Maidan” would be integrated into the new order.

This strengthening of the fascists would not be possible without the systematic support of the media and the main political parties in Europe and the US. Liberal newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* have produced a deluge of propaganda portraying events in Ukraine as a “democratic revolution”, glossing over the role of fascists and glorifying the coup.

Representatives of parties of all stripes—the US Democrats and Republicans, the Conservatives, Social Democrats, Greens and Pirates from Germany and other European countries—have made pilgrimages to Kiev to express their solidarity with the right-wing mob. In particular, Germany’s social-democratic Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier played a key role in the coup against Yanukovich.

The Left Party in Germany and numerous other pseudo-left organizations joined the campaign to obscure the role and nature of the Ukrainian fascists, supporting the coup in Kiev.

This shift towards fascist forces is not limited to Ukraine. Sections of the French bourgeoisie are turning towards the National Front (FN), which has benefited in turn from the right-wing, anti-working class policies of the Socialist Party. The FN currently is in first place in polls for the upcoming European elections. Underlying this shift to the right is the intensification of the international crisis of capitalism and growing social polarization.

In Kiev, the first task of the new government will be to administer the medicine already prescribed for Greece: austerity, welfare cuts and price increases. Representatives of the EU and the IMF have made clear that these are the prerequisites for the loans Ukraine needs to stave off bankruptcy. This will cheer the billionaire Ukrainian oligarchs, some of whom backed

the opposition, while others changed sides in the past few days.

The US and EU are using the coup in Ukraine to step up pressure on Russia, risking a military confrontation. In the *Financial Times*, former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warns that Russian meddling in Ukraine’s internal conflicts “would compel Washington to use its influence internationally to prompt steps that would be costly to Moscow.”

Throughout the crisis the working class in Ukraine has had no opportunity to intervene in political events. This is why the imperialist powers, competing oligarchic cliques, and the fascists were able to prevail. The growing threat of dictatorship and war—which is so clear today in Ukraine—can only be countered by a united movement of the international working class fighting to overthrow capitalism and all its backers on the basis of a socialist program.



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