New York Times' vision of Ukrainian "democracy"

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The *New York Times*, which from the outset of the Ukrainian crisis has tailored its coverage slavishly to the line of the US State Department, spelled out its vision for a "democratic Ukraine" Wednesday in an editorial entitled "A Critical Election in Ukraine."

Even as the country descends ever more dangerously into bloody civil war, the *Times* editorial board claimed to detect signs that "may bode well for the presidential election scheduled for Sunday."

The main signs, according to the editorial, are Russian President Vladimir Putin's failure to endorse the autonomy referenda held earlier this week in eastern Ukraine, and the pullback of Russian troops from the Ukrainian border.

The implication is clearly that the problems in Ukraine are entirely of Moscow's making. This is the propaganda line it has pursued for months, most notoriously in its publication of a front-page story, accompanied by photographic "evidence" supplied by the State Department and the Kiev regime, asserting that Russian special operations troops were directing the protests in eastern Ukraine. The so-called evidence was quickly exposed as fabricated and the story a lie, but this has done nothing to shift the *Times* coverage, which has the unmistakable stench of war propaganda.

In its latest editorial, the newspaper comments, "It is crucial for the vote to be accepted by all sides so Moscow can stop referring to the interim administration as the 'illegitimate regime in Kiev.'"

This is a rather odd reason to hold an election—to alter the way a government is depicted by the government of another country. The formulation begs the question as to what is the legitimacy of the Kiev regime, which was brought to power through the overthrow of an elected president by means of violent protests, orchestrated by Washington and its Western European allies and led by extreme nationalist and neo-fascist forces.

The *Times* acknowledges that the election is a contest between "chocolate king" Petro Poroshenko, the recently released "gas princess" Yulia Tymoshenko and the banker Sergey Tigipko, all of whom are members of "the clique of very rich businessmen who have been at the root of the corruption of the Ukrainian government" and who "made their fortunes in the chaotic privatization of state assets" following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In other words, the Ukrainian people are being asked to choose between a trio of criminals and parasites who enriched themselves at their expense through the theft of state property.

The front-runner Poroshenko, according to the *Times*, "has political strengths" that include backing the coup that toppled President Viktor Yanukovych, supporting the turn to the European Union and having been "deeply involved in Ukrainian politics from the outset." In other words, he is a deeply corrupt billionaire who appears prepared to subordinate himself to US policy aims.

Additional rays of hope are detected by the *Times'* editors in the activities of Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest billionaire, and Igor Kolomoisky, who ranks second or third in terms of the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth.

Kolomoisky, who the Kiev junta appointed as governor of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, is praised for putting up his own money for "bounties" placed on the heads of "terrorists," i.e., those in the east who have staged protests against the coup regime in Kiev. Kolomoisky, a mafia businessman who has in the past organized gangs of armed thugs to physically seize rival companies, has been implicated as an organizer of the horrific massacre carried out by fascist elements in Odessa earlier this month.

Akhmetov, who is said to be worth $11.6 billion, began his career, according to a documentary study of Donetsk, as a "mafia thug." A British historian specializing in Ukraine, Andrew Wilson, characterized him as an "enforcer" for a Donetsk crime boss who used extortion and physical violence to seize control of former state-owned property.

Akhmetov is lionized by the *Times* for "sending his steel and mining workers to recover occupied buildings in Mariupol and Makeyevka." The editorial adds: "Mr. Akhmetov's employees—and there are nearly 300,000 of them—evidently heeded his warning that their livelihoods

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would be uncertain under Russian control."

In the same edition of the paper containing the editorial, the *Times* carried a news report asserting that the anti-Kiev protesters in eastern Ukraine had faced "an unaccustomed wave of anger from residents" and that steelworkers had "easily wrested control of the port city of Mariupol last week under the direction of Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, who owns the mills where they work."

It went on to report that, "On Tuesday, workers at a steel mill in Mariupol and at a metalwork facility in the city of Yenakiyeve … left work at noon to listen to speeches in support of Ukrainian unity."

The newspaper characterized these events as "potentially giving an enormous lift to the provisional government in Kiev."

The *Times* report was notably short on detail, in large measure because the events it describes never happened. Rather they were gleaned from releases issued by the billionaire Akhmetov's press agents.

The occupied administration building in Mariupol was not "recovered" by miners and steelworkers; it was gutted in a brutal assault by the Ukrainian military and Right Sector fascists in which at least 20 civilians were murdered in a hail of automatic weapons and tank fire.

Those newspapers that were present in Mariupol and other Donbas areas where Akhmetov owns factories and mills described a very different scene than the one promoted by the *Times* .

Reporting from Akhmetov's Ilyich steelworks in Mariupol, the *Washington Post* said, "nobody stepped outside the factory gate when the plant whistle sounded at noon" for an announced protest.

"Alexei Primenko, 63, a locksmith in the steel plant's main office, was one of those who shrugged off the demonstration," the *Post* reported. "He said workers pay lip service to Akhmetov's calls for pro-Ukrainian support because they owe their salaries to him. But Primenko said their hearts are not in it. 'What's the demonstration going to give me?' he said."

The *Financial Times* was even blunter. "An appeal by Ukraine's richest man for hundreds of thousands of workers to protest against pro-Russian militants was largely ignored on Tuesday, in a setback for authorities in Kiev who hoped to build support for the presidential election on Sunday," the London financial newspaper reported.

According to the *FT* report, "turnout at the rallies was low and a number of workers in attendance said they supported the insurgents" opposing the Kiev regime. It described one "rally" of a few hundred workers outside the Donetsk Enakievo Metallurgical Works, a factory that employs 6,000. Addressed by the factory director, the "rally" took the form of a "team meeting" and lasted less than 10 minutes, with no political statements made.

"Afterwards, workers milling around said they had come to the meeting voluntarily but most said they did not share their boss Mr Akhmetov's views on the militants," the *FT* reported.

"Akhmetov is a businessman. He is looking after his business interests, it's natural," Stas, a worker, told the newspaper. He added that the plant director had been "wise" to avoid putting any "political accent" on the brief meeting.

"Ninety-nine per cent of the workers are against the Kiev authorities," Vladimir Sadovoy, the head of the factory workers' union told the newspaper. "Some want to be part of Russia, others want to be part of Ukraine, others want to be independent. But everyone is against the Kiev authorities, absolutely."

Once probed, the *New York Times* vision of "democracy" is revealed as so much smoke and mirrors. Behind the lies and state propaganda, however, the content of this vision is itself significant, consisting of a multi-billionaire oligarch ordering "his" workers to action, like some feudal lord sending his serfs into battle.

The newspaper's turn to the Ukrainian oligarchs as that country's saviors is clearly connected to the *Times'* orientation toward the financial oligarchy and the wealthy and privileged layers that surround it within the United States itself.

What the reports from eastern Ukraine show, however, is that all of the confusion and nationalist agitation notwithstanding, the working class is not some docile servant of this or that oligarch, but rather is hostile to the entire corrupt ruling strata and determined to defend its own interests. It is the independent political struggle of this class alone that can provide a progressive way out of the imperialist-instigated crisis in Ukraine.

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