

Protests mount against US-backed regime in Ukraine

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In the latest eruption of mass protests against the US puppet government of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, thousands of demonstrators swept through the streets of Kiev this weekend. Marchers demanded cancellation of martial law decrees, the repeal of subsidy cuts that have driven up the price of energy and foodstuffs, and the reversal of cuts to wages and pensions imposed by the government.

Demonstrators held placards demanding an end to cuts in pensions and denouncing the spiking prices of basic commodities. Slogans included "Raise pensions," "We are hungry," "Out with Yatsenyuk and his reforms," and "Impeach Poroshenko!"

The demonstrations over the weekend come on the heels of so-called "Financial Maidan" protests at the end of May, which saw thousands protest in Kiev against catastrophic economic conditions produced by the government's austerity policies.

An LGBT pride parade was assaulted by members of Right Sector and other far-right groups on Friday. The parade was quickly dispersed by attackers who reportedly threw rocks and tear gas capsules at the demonstrators.

In addition to the protest marches, Occupy-style tent camps, referred to in media reports as "Maidan 3.0," sprung up in the center of the city over the weekend. After refusing orders from police to take down the encampment, the campers were assaulted on Sunday by dozens of masked men brandishing black and red fascist flags. The attackers spoke with nearby police units before launching their attack, according to reports. *Sputnik News*, a Russian state media web site, charged US operatives with intervening inside the Occupy-style protest encampments. It alleged that the protest camps were organized by Rustam Tashbaev of the Stratagem Center for Political Analysis, a US think tank.

Sputnik's report featured an alleged photo of Tashbaev, a US citizen, posing for a portrait with US Senator John McCain.

Ukraine has undoubtedly become a hotbed of US intrigue, since a NATO-backed coup led by the fascist Right Sector militia toppled the country's pro-Russian government, and US operatives may well be intervening in the protests. However, what is driving the protests is rising opposition in the Ukrainian population to the Kiev regime's moves to transform Ukraine into a cheap labor platform and garrison state on behalf of the US-NATO war drive against Russia.

Since the February 2014 coup, the population has faced harsh cuts to pensions and social benefits, mass layoffs, sub-subsistence level wages, and skyrocketing prices of basic necessities. Thousands of Ukrainians have been killed and at least 1.5 million displaced, and production has virtually collapsed in the country's main industrial centers in Luhansk and Donetsk.

Ukraine's economy will likely contract by at least 9 percent in 2015, according to estimates by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The value of the Ukrainian currency will likely fall by nearly 50 percent in 2015 alone, according to the EBRD.

Last month, the price of water surged by more than 70 percent. Previous months saw increases in natural gas prices of nearly 300 percent. Food, medicine and transportation prices all rose dramatically in the year following the 2014 coup, with some basic items rising by more than 200 percent.

"We are about to see huge energy price increases. This will affect not just the poor but the middle class as well," Volodymyr Ischenko said in comments to the Center for Social and Labor Research this week.

Already in January, months before the latest price

hikes, some 30 percent of the population was unable to pay for utilities.

The rising prices are the result of cuts to subsidies for basic goods, dictated to Kiev by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The subsidy cuts free up government funds, which used to be earmarked for keeping energy and basic commodities relatively affordable for working people, to be shoveled into the pockets of Ukraine's creditors in the US and European banks.

There is escalating popular anger against the Kiev regime. Nearly 60 percent of the population is strongly dissatisfied with Poroshenko, with less than 25 percent expressing confidence in Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, according to polls released in March.

The war mounted by the pro-NATO regime against separatist forces in the East has met with large-scale draft dodging by the population in western Ukraine. At least 13,000 soldiers have gone AWOL from Ukrainian government forces since the beginning of the civil war.

More than 80 percent of draftees have failed to respond to musters from the government, and Ukrainian officers now assume that only some 15 percent of soldiers sent on leave will return to their units, according to statistics published by the *Washington Post* in April.

Even as the economy plummets and popular opposition to the government grows, the re-eruption of military conflict between Kiev regime forces and pro-Russian separatists is plunging the country back toward the conditions of brutal civil war that developed in the aftermath of last year's coup.

According to *Foreign Policy*, the outbreak of fighting last week has "shattered" the Minsk cease-fire agreement reached this February. The always unstable pause in the fighting, which was largely forced upon the Kiev regime by the deepening economic crisis, has likely been "permanently destroyed" by the renewed clashes, *Foreign Policy* wrote.

Fearful that its Ukrainian puppet regime could suffer a new defeat or implode politically due to popular opposition, Washington is mobilizing paramilitary forces to prop up the Kiev regime. "They've allowed the Right Sector to integrate with Ukraine's national army. You have US army officers training units with members of Right Sector in them," political analyst Aleksandar Pavic noted in comments to RT Tuesday.

A new generation of Ukrainian fascists are receiving training and advanced military hardware, including night-vision and communications technology, supplied directly by the US Defense Department.

In April, the Pentagon dispatched some 300 US soldiers to conduct training exercises with Ukrainian militants, including known members of the Azov Battalion and other forces affiliated with Ukraine's neo-Nazi milieu, as part of "Operation Fearless Guardian." Comments from Ukrainian anti-terror chief Andriy Lysenko made clear that the training would focus on counter-insurgency tactics designed to control enemy populations, along the lines of those used by the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan.



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