

Ukrainians testify to a life of poverty and violence under US-backed government

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Last month marked the one-year anniversary of the election of oligarch Petro Poroshenko to the presidency of Ukraine. The Poroshenko regime came to power in the aftermath of a US- and German-backed coup, spearheaded by fascist forces, which ousted President Victor Yanukovych in February 2014. Since coming to power, the right-wing government has waged a brutal military campaign against pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Donbass region, implemented brutal austerity measures and banned the public display of Communist symbols.

The WSWWS recently spoke with Ukrainian workers and students on the current state of social and economic conditions under the Poroshenko regime. Millions of ordinary Ukrainians are struggling to cope with the crisis provoked by the implementation of austerity policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to decline by at least another 5 percent in 2015 after falling 7 percent in 2014. GDP per capita is now below the level it was at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Andrei, a 37-year-old industrial engineer from Kiev who has lost several friends in the fighting told the WSWWS, "I have not seen any improvement in conditions here for at least a couple years, and that includes the regime of Poroshenko. A lot of people have lost their jobs. Not a single politician or general has done anything to change the situation here for the better. The war is being artificially supported by the politicians, and everyone knows war is one of the most profitable businesses there is."

With inflation expected to reach 46 percent by the end of the year, paying for essential items like medicine and housing has become increasingly difficult. Olesya, a 24-year-old programmer from Lviv observed, "In general, people in Ukraine are living in poverty. It is caused by low wages. Over the past year things have greatly

worsened due to the fall of the hryvnia by almost double, inflation, and the rise of prices for electricity and gas by 3-4 times."

She added, "Few Ukrainians are able to look after their health. Firstly, due to the lack of funds. Although in theory medicine is supposed to be free in Ukraine, in reality, in most cases if you do not bribe a doctor with money they will not treat you. Secondly, there is also a lack of qualified specialists. I am convinced that a lot of our economic problems are a result of corruption on the part of the government."

While Olesya initially supported the Poroshenko regime, she no longer does. "With Poroshenko we have seen no visible results. The appointments he makes to the government do nothing to meet the needs of society," she stated.

Of all the people the WSWWS spoke to, Anastasia, a student from Selydove, which is located just 30 miles from the war-torn and separatist controlled city of Donetsk, has experienced the effects of the war most directly. Several of her friends who refused to join the fighting on the side of Kiev were imprisoned by the Ukrainian military. Her aunt's home was destroyed by shelling between government and separatist forces, but luckily she was able to survive the attack.

Anastasia placed the responsibility for the war solely in the hands of the current right-wing government. "The war all started with a violent change of government. The main instigators were already members of the power elite. They are to blame for the expansion of the war. You can see how Poroshenko and [Prime Minister Arseniy] Yatsenyuk have manufactured an enemy and are using the war to dump all the country's trouble on, but they are the ones that caused it."

In regards to the state of the economy, Anastasia stated, "After becoming president, the economic and social situation under Poroshenko has only worsened in

comparison to previous years. He has not fulfilled even one of the promises he gave before the election, but he is living up to his campaign slogan of ‘Live a New Way.’ We are certainly living ‘a new way’—that is, five times worse than before.”

“What do we have today,” she observed. “They’ve actually introduced a 1.5 percent tax on us to support the Ukrainian army. They are even proposing to make high school students pay for their education, which will make education inaccessible to certain sections of the population. Ukraine is now a pioneer country in taxing even people with pensions.”

While the western media continues to uncritically publish Poroshenko’s claims of fighting for “democracy” and a “free Ukraine” with “European values,” Anastasia testified to a frightening crackdown on all forms of democratic rights. She specifically cited the cases of journalists Oles Buzina, who was killed on the street in Kiev, and Ruslan Kotsaba, who has been imprisoned for high treason after encouraging Ukrainians not to serve in the government’s military forces.

“All those who go on strike, demonstrate, or express their opinions in opposition to the Kiev regime are labeled ‘Kremlin agents,’ ‘Putin’s Provocateurs’ and so on,” Anastasia said. “They even go after civil servants now. They have also banned the transmission of Russian-language channels, films and TV shows. The government is also passing laws to ban Communists, destroy old Soviet monuments and glorify the supposed heroes of the UPA [the right-wing, Ukrainian nationalist movement that during World War II allied itself with the Nazis against the Soviet Union]. I think our current government should write a book and call it “How to Destroy a Country in Six Months.”

When asked what she would like workers in other countries to know about the situation in Ukraine, Anastasia said, “I want to add for myself and from all the residents of the Donbass region that the people who live here are hard working ordinary people, not terrorists. We all want peace and tranquility.”



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