Two years since the Kiev coup

Part two

Andrea Peters
8 March 2016

This, the second part of a two-part article on two years since the 2014 Maidan coup in Ukraine, reviews the role of various pseudo-left organizations. The first part *was posted on March 7.*

The pseudo-left and Maidan

In February 2014, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown in a right-wing coup backed by the US and Germany. In the months leading up to and after this event, the *World Socialist Web Site* exposed the forces behind the "Maidan" movement, which was led by a combination of free-marketeers, ultra-nationalists and neo-fascists who exploited popular discontent with Yanukovych to install a virulently anti-Russian government with close ties to Washington and Berlin.

The analysis of the WSWS then and now demonstrates the immense chasm separating it from a line-up of pseudo-left tendencies such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US, the New Anti-capitalist Party of France (NPA), and the Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), which applauded the Maidan "revolution" and claimed that it bore some sort of progressive character. Hailing the ouster of Yanukovych as a positive transformation that could be utilized by the "left" for its own purposes, they sought to cover up the fact that the real target of the coup was not the anti-democratic and corrupt practices of Yanukovych, but the working class of Ukraine, Russia and the world.

In taking this position, these organizations simply extended their support for imperialism to a new domain. Having backed the interventions in Libya and Syria, portraying these imperialist wars for regime-change as democratic revolutions, they lined up behind Washington and Berlin and their fascistic proxy forces in Ukraine. In 2011, for instance, the NPA's Gilbert Achcar wrote: "Every general rule admits of exceptions. This includes the general rule that UN-authorized military interventions by imperialist powers are purely reactionary ones and can never achieve a humanitarian or positive purpose."

From the very outset, the RSM served as a leading mouthpiece for the Maidan protests. Formed in 2011, this organization, like its fake-left counterparts around the world, declared its goal to be the creation of a broad coalition of "anti-capitalist leftists." It rejected Trotskyism and the lessons of Trotsky's struggle against the nationalist degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalin. It accommodated itself to anti-immigrant chauvinism and promoted economic nationalism.

The RSM maintains that the major task confronting the "left" in Russia today is the fight for a "democratic revolution." On this basis, it champions various forms of identity politics. It has forged coalitions with an array of forces, both liberal and overtly right-wing, including proponents of free-market capitalism, trade union bureaucrats and Stalinists. During the anti-Putin protests of 2011-2012, a leading faction of the group welcomed the campaign of the right-wing Russian nationalist and anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny as having opened "the door to public politics."

During the Maidan protests, as reports of assaults on workers and leftists at demonstrations and images of protesters smashing statues of Lenin hit the media, the RSM insisted that Maidan not be abandoned. In late January 2014, when the WSWS was warning that the Western-backed Ukrainian opposition was determined to provoke a civil war to gain power, the RSM's Workers' Platform group proclaimed, "In today's Ukraine, we're seeing the most genuine revolutionary situation."

In another statement issued the same day entitled "Maidan: Not Our War?" the RSM described those opposing participation in the protests as "philistines" who did not wish to get their hands dirty. It proclaimed, "This is our movement! This is our war!"

Ivan Ovsiannikov, a leading member of the RSM in Saint Petersburg, insisted, "Russian official propaganda representing the Ukrainian events as a putsch by Lvov fascists, professionals of the US State Department, is false." He then admitted, however, that this characterization rested upon "a half-truth," on which he failed to elaborate.

Ilya Budraitskis, an RSM member whose views were broadcast widely in pseudo-left publications of various stripes, readily acknowledged the overwhelming presence of the far-right in the Maidan demonstrations. He described the fascist Right Sector as "courageous fighters." When asked what the "left" should do given that the movement was dominated by neo-Nazis, Budraitskis said it had to participate alongside these forces. "Of course," he wrote, "it means I have to leave my beloved red flag at home because it doesn't get a good reception. So what? I want to come into political contact with people. Radical is what brings success."

On February 20, 2014, as observers became increasingly horrified at the savage violence meted out by the Right Sector, including the use of improvised napalm, the RSM posted an article entitled, "Don't cultivate pity for tyranny." It was accompanied by a picture of a member of the Ukrainian security services being burned alive after what presumably was a fire-bomb attack.

Budraitskis argued that it was necessary to build a "Left Sector" in Ukraine, with the primary goal of bringing down Ukraine's Communist Party (KPU). He welcomed "a close to [the KPU's] ignominious existence," and insisted that the call to ban the organization and Yanukovych's Russian-speaking Party of Regions was not a reactionary demand of the far-right, but a positive manifestation of popular hostility towards those organizations' ties to oligarchs and Russia. With the outlawing of the KPU and the banning of all Communist-era symbols by the new Ukrainian government, Budraitskis has gotten what he wished for.

This anti-communism was accompanied by a fawning attitude towards Maidan's ferocious Ukrainian nationalism. The RSM, for instance, insisted that Maidan was progressive because it expressed the population's desire to get out from under the Russian yoke, a position that

© World Socialist Web Site

was identical to that of Ukraine's nationalists. In April 2014, the RSM's Maksim Osadchik waxed enthusiastically, "Maidan is not only a democratic revolution, but also the final act in the formation of a political nation. Two winter months gave Ukraine all its attributes—national pride, a national myth and national martyrs." This "national pride" included the rehabilitation of Ukrainian Nazi collaborators, a fact he ignored.

The support for nationalism and separatism of the RSM and other pro-Kiev pseudo-left forces extends only to those cases where it serves the interests of Western imperialism and lays the ideological groundwork for the ethno-nationalist breakup of Russia. As the Kiev government was working in 2014 to physically crush opposition to its rule in the predominantly Russian-speaking eastern parts of Ukraine, the RSM busied itself with denouncing as "imperialist pillage" Russia's incorporation of Crimea, which followed a popular referendum on the peninsula that overwhelmingly supported unification with Moscow. The RSM embraced the hysterical anti-Russian propaganda emanating from Western capitals and the media.

The ISO's *Socialist Worker* was likewise filled with denunciations of the Putin government. In March of 2014 the organization condemned "some on the left in the US and Europe" for insisting that the "'main enemy,' imperialism, is 'at home.'" To do so, according to the ISO, meant "renouncing the mass uprising that overthrew the Yanukovych regime and accepting the lying justifications of Russian imperialists for trying to maintain power in *their* 'backyard.'"

To mark the one-year anniversary of the Maidan coup, the French NPA (with which the RSM is aligned) endorsed a statement put out by the anti-Trotskyist United Secretariat of the Fourth International implying that those who said the pro-Kiev forces were led by fascists were spewing Moscow propaganda. This statement blamed the coming to the fore of ultra-nationalists in Ukraine on "the past experience of Great Russian policies, the repressive nature of Putin's regime, the war in Donbass and the annexation of Crimea by Russia."

The main target of all of these groups was and continues to be the Putin government, which they denounce for everything from anti-gay bigotry to the civil war in Syria, even as they support American, German and French imperialism's military interventions and regime-change operations in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is intransigently hostile to the Kremlin regime and the capitalist oligarchy it represents. The power and wealth of this ruling elite were handed to it by the Stalinist bureaucracy, which in the 1980s set about destroying the nationalized property relations established by the Russian Revolution in order to transform itself into a property-owning class. The Putin government seeks to find its way out of the current economic and geopolitical crisis through a combination of brutal domestic austerity measures, pleas to Washington and Europe for some sort of mutual accommodation, and the exercise of military force. It is an enemy of the working class.

However, the denunciations of Russia as "imperialist" by the pseudo-left have no purpose other than to downplay and cover up the crimes of the United States and the European powers. By supporting so-called "humanitarian interventions," "national liberation" struggles and allegedly democratic "color revolutions" against "Russian imperialism," these organizations are attempting to provide a cover for the rapacious and neo-colonial policies of Washington and Berlin. In April 2014, the RSM wrote: "It is time to acknowledge that we live in a society that is much more right-wing that any country in Western Europe, and even the United States." This was nothing more than a justification for lining up behind the aggressive and militaristic policies of Western imperialism, which seeks to reduce Russia, as well as China, to the status of semi-colonies.

Today, the RSM is attempting to give the Maidan movement Marxist credentials by claiming that the far-right coup in Kiev was the equivalent of the 1905 Russian Revolution, which Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks supported. In an article entitled "Lenin on Maidan," the organization writes: "The experience of the past period's 'color revolutions' did not give us examples of a transition of power from one group of the elite to another, but to organs of self-organization that grew out of a popular movement." The RSM essentially claims that the ultra-nationalist militias formed out of Maidan, which serve as a major base of support for the current government and its austerity measures, are somehow equivalent to "a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry."

What of those in the pseudo-left who claim to have opposed Maidan and the Kiev regime?

After initially arguing in February 2014 that the predominance of far-right forces in the Maidan movement "does not mean that one should not take part and be active in Maidan (or in its orbit), and use the temporary weakening of state control and the really emerging power vacuum to create personal autonomous spaces through which one can enter into the new 'post-Maidan' stage of political life," the well known Russian pseudo-left figure Boris Kagarlitsky began to denounce the Kiev government and call for the building of a Novorossiya (New Russia) in Ukraine's Donbass.

Kagarlitsky is a long-time political operator in Russia. During the 1980s he was a proponent of Mikhail Gorbachev's pro-market *perestroika* and supported the restoration of capitalism in the USSR. Up until a few years ago he was closely associated with the RSM. He maintains close relations with the Communist Party and Russia's trade union bureaucrats.

In July 2014, Kagarlitsky teamed up in Yalta, which is on the Crimean peninsula, with a number of pseudo-left forces to issue a "manifesto" on Maidan and the pro-Russian separatist movement that erupted in Ukraine's southeast. It argued that the separatists in the region were leading a "popular-liberation revolution" that could be pushed to the left and result in the creation of a state that guaranteed "the interests of the people and their all-sided development," forbade exploitative private property and "usurious finance capital," and provided pensions and social benefits.

Nothing of the sort happened, nor could it have. The forces that came to power in the breakaway regions of Ukraine's Donbass were not left-wing representatives of the genuine mass opposition that existed in the region to the Kiev coup. They were a mixture of right-wing Russian nationalist, pro-capitalist and even monarchist elements, who filled the political vacuum created by the collapse of support for the Kiev government and the mass exodus of a population fleeing war. While there was an initial attempt on their part to make use of left-wing sentiment and nostalgia for the Soviet past to find a base of support within the population, this was a mask for a reactionary, nationalist outlook.

For instance, even as they played the Internationale at official functions, the leaders of the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR) proclaimed Russian Orthodoxy to be the state religion. On July 8, 2014, then-DPR military commander Strelkov vented, "We are fighting here specifically for Russia and for the rights of the Donetsk Republic's people. We are battling here for the USSR and for the Donetsk people's rights as a part of the USSR. For the USSR as our universal, divine Motherland." These remarks, which are a rejection of the revolutionary and internationalist origins of the Soviet Union, are a crude product of Stalinism and Russian chauvinism.

From the start, the leaders of these "People's Republics" explicitly stated that they had "no relationship to communists who seize and nationalize things," and insisted on "respect" for "the right of private property." Eduard Limonov, the head of the Russian far-right National Bolshevik Party, praised the pseudo-left's "Novorossiya" project as a "red-brown" alliance.

Kagarlitsky and those grouped around him now lament the failure of Novorossiya, arguing that it is a product of the betrayal of the Russian nation by the Kremlin, which intervened in southeastern Ukraine to

© World Socialist Web Site

defend its neo-liberal agenda and bureaucratic interests. A recent editorial posted on Kagarlitsky's web site, *Rabkor*, states: "The hope that in Novorossiya it would be possible to create a new, more democratic and more progressive state than currently exists in Russia (not even talking about Ukraine) never materialized. And not because these hopes were groundless. Rather, the very opposite. They were entirely real. The Kremlin administration, as well as we and our co-thinkers, understood this and alas... [the Kremlin] worked on suppressing everything living and progressive that there was in the movement for Novorossiya."

The idea that a progressive statelet that guarantees the welfare of the population could be carved out of an impoverished section of Eastern Europe and southwestern Russia ravaged by deindustrialization, wholly dependent on access to international markets for whatever wealth it produces, and at the center of an explosive conflict between the West and Russia is absurd and reactionary. It is little more than a rehashing of the Stalinist program of "socialism in one country"—minus even the reference to socialism.

Concluded

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site