

Ukraine: Poroshenko declares martial law to crack down on political and social opposition

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Following its provocation of a major international crisis in the Azov Sea last Sunday, ahead of the G20 Summit in Argentina, the Ukrainian regime of Petro Poroshenko, brought to power in a US-backed far-right coup in February 2014, has imposed martial law in 10 of Ukraine's 24 provinces (oblasts), affecting about 40 percent of the country's population. Martial law will be in effect until December 27 in ten regions that border Russia and the Black Sea.

It is the first time that martial law has been declared in Ukraine since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. While recklessly escalating the crisis with Russia, with the imposition of martial law the Poroshenko regime is creating conditions for a violent crackdown on social and political opposition in Ukraine.

Under martial law, functions of the police are being performed by the military, which is empowered to raid apartments and cars. The army has been put on high alert and the presence of police has been substantially increased in major cities.

Poroshenko now has the ability to ban public protests and meetings, control and limit transportation, and ban any speech that is broadly defined, and intentionally so, as speech "aiding Russia." On Friday, it was reported that the Ukrainian government has barred all Russian men aged 16-60 from entering the country.

Poroshenko, who has based his presidency on the support of the major imperialist powers and a narrow base of nationalist and far-right forces in Ukraine, is widely hated, and is expected to lose the presidential elections in March 2019. Recent polls indicated that only 12 percent of the voters would vote for him. Initially, Poroshenko tried to impose martial law for 60 days, which would have delayed the presidential elections. However, after a public outcry, including from his political opponents within the bourgeoisie, he

was forced to reduce this period to 30 days.

The regions in which martial law is now in effect are also the parts of the country—especially Donetsk and Lugansk—that are the center of the ongoing fighting of Ukrainian armed forces against the Russian-backed separatists.

They are the regions where a substantial portion of the population, if not a majority, speaks Russian rather than Ukrainian, and follows the Russian media.

Almost five years since the beginning of the civil war in the country's East, which began after the far-right coup in Kiev in early 2014, and which has claimed the lives of over 10,000 people, there is growing opposition to war and the fascistic policies of the Poroshenko regime. Kiev's draconian austerity measures have driven some one million Ukrainians to the brink of starvation, with living standards in much of the country now resembling those in completely impoverished countries in Africa.

Social tensions have reached explosive dimensions since Poroshenko imposed gas hikes on October 19th, raising gas prices by over 23 percent in order to gain an additional \$3.9 billion IMF loan necessary to the keep the government afloat. The IMF for its part was quick to back the declaration of martial law. It is estimated that the rise in gas prices will bring in an extra \$300 million per year to Kiev, which will go to pay off the country's approximately \$16 billion in foreign debt that is scheduled for repayment between 2018 and 2020.

Because of the IMF-imposed gas price hikes, over a million Ukrainians had their heating cut off just as the country heads into winter and temperatures start to drop rapidly. Starting on November 1st, Naftogaz, Ukraine's national gas company, began disputing debt repayments with several Ukrainian cities, and refused to send gas to

areas with unpaid bills. Hundreds of working-class Ukrainians responded by blocking roads and confronting government officials.

In Kryvy Rih, the country's eighth most populous city, protestors set tires on fire and seized the offices of the local gas provider. The city, located in the southern Dnepropetrovsk province, is now adjacent to four other provinces where martial law has been imposed. In Kherson, over 100,000 were without heat, including 30 of the region's schools and kindergartens. Kherson is one of the provinces now under martial law.

The town of Smela in central Ukraine was also left without heat, leaving thousands in schools, hospitals and apartment buildings in the freezing cold. Hospital patients had to be moved due to the freezing temperatures. Residents reacted by blocking roads and demanded that the heat be turned back on. On November 12th the town's mayor declared a state of emergency.

Heat was only returned after Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman and Poroshenko personally intervened to order its resumption. Hot water and heating bills are expected to increase another 15 percent starting on December 1st in accordance with the IMF agreement, suggesting that the regime can expect even more explosive confrontations as consumer prices continue to rise.

Ukraine has also seen multiple strikes and protests by thousands of miners, including major demonstrations in Kiev in the summer which sent shock waves through the ruling class. More recently, at the Kaputsin coal mine in eastern Ukraine, workers went on strike in October over unpaid wages. Workers have occupied parts of the mine, participated in hunger strikes and threatened to spread the strike to the western regions of the country by blocking roads from western Europe.

In addition, Ukrainian car owners have been blocking border crossings and highways, and burning mounds of tires around the country, after Kiev imposed a new tax on the importation of cars and current cars with foreign registrations. Many Ukrainians purchase used cars with EU registrations due to their better quality and significantly cheaper prices, and then bring them into the country for personal use.

In a chilling demonstration of how the Poroshenko regime is dealing with political opponents, just a day after the declaration of martial law, presidential

candidate Anatolyi Hrytsenko of the center-right "Our Ukraine" Party was attacked by 30 masked thugs at a campaign interview in Odessa. Despite the fact that police were standing right at the scene of the assault, no one was detained, according to one of Hrytsenko's supporters. Police also stated they were investigating the melee as a case of "hooliganism" rather than a planned political attack.

Hrytsenko has since accused Poroshenko of using thugs to do his political dirty work for him. In most polls Hrytsenko is even or ahead of Poroshenko. Just a few weeks ago, another Ukrainian politician died after a barbaric acid attack perpetrated by fascist thugs who are suspected of direct ties to the Poroshenko government.

In yet another demonstration of their boundless hypocrisy, the pro-imperialist media has widely supported Poroshenko's imposition of martial law. *Time Magazine*, which pushed for Trump to "stand up to Putin" over the Azov Sea crisis, praised Poroshenko for having "successfully declared martial law" and "energized his defense establishment." While relentlessly denouncing Putin as a ruthless dictator, the imperialist powers, in pursuit of their geostrategic interests and with the support of their lackeys in the media, are backing a far-right government in Ukraine that is setting a new precedent for the escalation of dictatorial rule in Europe, and provoking a possible war with Russia that would endanger the lives of millions.



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