Ukraine bans largest opposition party

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A Ukrainian court has officially banned the activities of the country's largest opposition party, the Opposition Platform—For Life party.

The decision was handed down by the Administrative Court of Appeals No. 8 on June 20 in Lviv and effectively upheld President Volodymyr Zelensky's banning of 11 political parties that Kiev regarded as "anti-Ukrainian" and "collaborationists" earlier in March. The measure was then approved by the Ukrainian parliament in May.

Ten other pro-Russian and left-wing parties were included in Zelensky's ban, among them the Socialist Party of Ukraine and the Party of Shariy led by the popular Youtube blogger Anatoly Shariy.

In addition to legally banning the party's activities, the court also stated that the party's property and assets will be confiscated by the State Treasury.

The banning of the country's largest opposition party marks the temporary culmination of an undemocratic campaign initiated by the Zelensky government against parties and individuals who could potentially undermine the war that Kiev is waging against Russia on behalf of the imperialist powers.

Led by oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk, the party controlled 44 out of 450 seats in Ukraine's parliament, surpassed only by the ruling Servant of the People party of President Volodymyr Zelensky. Prior to Russia's invasion in February, several opinion polls showed the Russia-aligned party leading hypothetical parliamentary elections or finishing second.

In eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, Opposition—For Life functioned as the dominant political party at both national and local levels. It was the effective successor to the Party of Regions of former President Viktor Yanukovych. In contrast to his opponents in the oligarchy that, with the heavy backing from US and German imperialism, toppled him in 2014 in a coup, Yanukovich spoke for a faction of the Ukrainian oligarchy that has been seeking to balance between Western imperialism and the Kremlin, and opposed a direct alliance of Ukraine with NATO.

Prior to 2014, the Party of Regions was the country's largest political party but it disintegrated after the coup as its members fled the country or joined Opposition Bloc, the pro-Moscow predecessor of the Opposition—For Life party.

Medvedchuk, the co-founder and head of the Opposition—For Life party, is a billionaire who has long maintained very close ties to the Russian oligarchy and, in particular, the Putin regime.

However, Medvedechuk's Opposition—For Life party publicly denounced Russia's invasion of the country and called for negotiations to quickly end the war. Twenty-three of its national parliament members voluntarily left the party and formed the Platform for Life and Peace party which has pledged to protect Russian-minority rights within Ukraine but distanced itself even further from Medvedchuk and Moscow.

Throughout its existence, the party supported the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which were intended to end the war in the eastern Donbass region between Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian government through a settlement negotiated with French and German imperialism. Despite coming to power in 2019 on vague promises to secure peace, prior to the invasion Zelensky and his staff were openly hostile to the agreements' implementation, which called for a federated status in the separatist-controlled regions and local elections.

For over a year prior to the current war, the Zelensky government, at the behest of US imperialism, worked systematically to stamp out the party's influence, and in February of 2021 undemocratically banned three popular television stations associated with Medvedchuk. At the time, the move was praised by the US Embassy as part of Kiev's efforts "to counter

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Russia's malign influence, in line with Ukrainian law, in defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Later in May 2021 Medvedchuk was arrested and charged with "embezzlement" as well as "high treason" for "subversive activities against Ukraine." A Ukrainian court placed him under house arrest, where he would remain until the outbreak of full-scale war in February of this year, when he fled.

On April 12, Medvedchuk was apprehended by Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) while apparently disguised as a Ukrainian soldier and again charged him with treason for supposedly providing Russia with military assistance.

No evidence has been published indicating how exactly Medvedchuk supposedly collaborated with the Russians. Nor has it been explained why he remained in Kiev days after the attack, putting his life in certain danger, if he really did know of the impending invasion beforehand.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has publicly offered Moscow to exchange Medvedchuk for captured Ukrainian soldiers. Moscow has so far publicly refused to discuss the exchange of its supposed stalwart collaborator, but recent reports suggest he could be swapped for British nationals recently captured by separatist forces.

While under arrest, Medvedchuk has become entangled in the ongoing prosecution of former President Petro Poroshenko, another Zelensky political rival. In May, the SBU released a video in which Medvedchuk accused Poroshenko of enlisting his assistance to illegally purchase a Russian oil pipeline.

Due to his immense wealth and political influence, Medvedchuk undoubtedly knows much about "where the bodies are buried"—both figuratively and literally in the case of bourgeois Ukrainian politics—and it is likely the Zelensky government will now exploit him to continue its persecution of political enemies.

Whatever the ultimate fate of Medvedchuk and the remnants of his political party, the banning and state liquidation of oppositional parties exposes the lie that Ukraine is a bulwark of "democracy" that needs to be defended in a "just war" against totalitarian Russia.

In reality, Ukraine is controlled by a section of the reactionary ultra-wealthy oligarchy that has emerged out of the Stalinist destruction of the Soviet Union and which has chosen an open alliance with NATO against Russia. It is now demonstrating with the war that it is willing and able to kill hundreds of thousands of its own citizens to maintain its rule and pro-NATO orientation. According to officials of the ruling party, between 200 and 500 members of the Ukrainian armed forces are dying every single day in the war in east Ukraine. There are also growing reports of desertions on both sides of the conflict.

The banning of the Opposition—For Life party and other oppositional parties makes clear that the imperialist-backed Zelensky government will stop at nothing to crush opposition to its war—above all when it emerges within the working class.

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