

Ideological opponents of the Ukrainian government are waiting for prison or death

Report by a Ukrainian socialist

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This article was submitted to the WSWS by Maxim Goldarb, the head of the Union of Left Forces (For a New Socialism) party, which has been banned by the Zelensky government. The World Socialist Web Site unequivocally opposes and denounces the persecution of left-wing and oppositional tendencies in Ukraine by the NATO-backed Zelensky regime. We call on our readers to distribute the information about the state-backed repression of anti-war opposition in Ukraine as widely as possible.

Ukraine has long been proclaimed the freest country in the post-Soviet space. In the pro-NATO media, the country is even portrayed as a bulwark of democracy. But this is a lie. The right-wing oligarchic regime that came to power in the Western-backed coup in February 2014 has severely persecuted its opponents, using terrorist methods.

The most tragic example of not just persecution, but murder by the ruling regime in Kiev of its ideological opponents took place in Odessa on May 2, 2014, when far-right nationalists, with the full connivance of and open assistance from the authorities, blocked anti-fascist activists in the building of the House of Trade Unions and set fire to the building. To escape the burning building, many jumped out of windows to their death. Even on the ground, some of those who had survived were then murdered by neo-Nazis. In total, more than 40 people died, among whom were Vadim Papura, a member of the Komsomol (Communist youth union), as well as Andrei Brazhevsky, a member of the left-wing Borotba organization.

For this crime, no one was ever punished, even though those responsible were recorded in many photos and videos. One of the organizers of this massacre subsequently became the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, another one became a member of parliament on the lists of the party of former President Petro Poroshenko.

In the same way, the killers of a number of well-known opposition politicians and journalists who have died since 2014 have not been punished. This includes the ex-deputy of the Socialist Party of Ukraine, Valentina Semenyuk-Samsonenko (her murder on August 27, 2014 was disguised as suicide); the ex-deputy and organizer of opposition actions Oleg Kalashnikov (he was killed on April 15, 2015); the popular writer and anti-fascist publicist Oles Buzina (killed on April 16, 2015), and many others.

The Communist Party of Ukraine, one of the largest parties in the country, was banned in 2015.

In addition, opposition-minded politicians, journalists and activists, many of whom are left-leaning, have been beaten, arrested and imprisoned in recent years on trumped-up charges of “high treason” and other overtly political charges. This happened, in particular, with

journalists Vasily Muravitsky, Dmitry Vasilets and Pavel Volkov, as well as human rights activist Ruslan Kotsaba and others. It is telling that even in the courts, which are under heavy pressure from the authorities, the accusations of “high treason” as a rule fell apart and turned out to be completely untenable.

The situation has become more and more aggravated with each passing year, especially after Volodymyr Zelensky became the president of Ukraine. The formal reason for the complete elimination of the remnants of civil liberties and the start of open political repression was the military conflict in Ukraine that began in February 2022.

All opposition parties in Ukraine, most of which are left-wing parties, including the Union of Left Forces (For New Socialism) party, which I lead, were banned on fabricated, carbon-copy accusations of being “pro-Russian.”

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) has also detained a number of opinion leaders and journalists who spoke to the media before the war, criticizing the government. All of them were accused of promoting a pro-Russian position, high treason, espionage, propaganda, etc.

- In February-March 2022, a number of well-known bloggers and journalists were detained on charges of high treason and placed in pre-trial detention centers (SIZOs). Among them were Dmitry Dzhangirov (a supporter of leftist views, who worked with our party), Yan Taksyur (a supporter of leftist views), Dmitry Marunich, Mikhail Pogrebinsky, Yuri Tkachev, and others. The reason for their detention was not ephemeral treason at all, but the authorities’ fear of their public political position, which did not coincide with the official line of the government.

- In March 2022, the historian Alexander Karevin, known for his political activities, disappeared without a trace after SBU officers visited his house. Karevin has repeatedly sharply criticized the actions of the Ukrainian authorities in the field of the humanities, language policy and the politics of historical memory.

- In March 2022 in Kiev, Olena Berezhnaya, a lawyer and human rights activist, well known for her anti-fascist positions, was detained and placed in a pre-trial detention center under suspicion under Article 111 of the Criminal Code, i.e., for treason. Just a few months prior, in December 2021, she had spoken at the UN Security Council about the lawlessness in Ukraine.

- On March 3, 2022, the SBU detained the left-wing activists and anti-fascist brothers Alexander and Mikhail Kononovich in Kiev on charges of violating Article 109 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine

(“actions aimed at forcibly changing the constitutional order or seizing state power”). They were placed in a pre-trial detention center until the end of 2022, where they were beaten and tortured, and denied timely medical assistance.

- In May 2022, in Dnipro, the SBU detained the brother of the former presidential candidate Oleg Tsarev, citizen of Ukraine Mikhail Tsarev, on charges of “destabilizing the socio-political situation in the region.” As a result, in December 2022, he was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison on charges of terrorism.

- On March 7, 2022, six activists of the opposition organization Patriots for Life disappeared without a trace in Severodonetsk. In May 2022, one of the leaders of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, Maxim Zhorin, posted a photo of their dead bodies on the Internet, claiming that they “were executed,” and that their murder was connected to their political views and carried out by paramilitary structures.

- On January 12, 2023, Sergei Titov, a resident of Belaya Tserkov, a half-blind and disabled person with a mental illness, was detained and placed in a pre-trial detention center. He was declared a ‘saboteur.’ On March 2, 2023, it was reported that he had died in the pre-trial detention center.

- In February 2023, Dmitry Skvortsov, an Orthodox publicist and blogger, was detained in a monastery near Kiev and placed in a pre-trial detention center.

- Since November 2022, Dmitry Shymko from Khmelnytsky has been in the dungeons for his political beliefs.

- Hundreds of ordinary people have already been prosecuted in today’s Ukraine for distributing political content on the Internet that the authorities considered prohibited.

The authorities have taken under tight control the information space of Ukraine, including the Internet. Any personal publication of citizens about mistakes at the front, about corruption among the authorities and the military, and about the lies of officials are declared to be crimes. Such individuals, as well as bloggers and administrators of TG channels, are subject to harassment by the police and the Security Service.

By the spring of this year, according to the SBU, 26 Telegram channels were blocked—channels on which people had informed each other about the locations where military summons were being handed out. Six Telegram channel administrators were searched and charged with crimes. Thus, public pages were blocked in the Ivano-Frankivsk, Cherkasy, Vinnitsa, Chernivtsi, Kiev, Lviv and Odessa regions. These pages had more than 400,000 subscribers. The public administrators of these channels face 10 years in prison.

In March 2022, Article 436-2 (“Justification, recognition as lawful, denial of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, glorification of its participants”) was introduced into the Criminal Code of Ukraine. In reality, it is directed against any citizens of Ukraine who have views that differ from the official government line.

This new law is formulated in such a way that, in essence, it provides for punishment for “thought crimes”—words or phrases spoken not only publicly, but also in a private conversation, written in a private messenger or SMS message, or said over the phone. In fact, we are talking about an invasion of the privacy of citizens and of their thoughts. This, in fact, has been confirmed by the practice of law enforcement—conviction for likes, private phone calls, and so on. For simple conversations on the street and likes on the Internet under posts, as of March 2023 there have been 380 sentences, based on court records, including those sentenced to prison.

Thus, in June 2022, in Dnipro, a resident of Mariupol was sentenced to five years in prison, with a trial period of two years. In March 2022, the individual had claimed that shelling of the civilian population and civilian infrastructure in Mariupol was carried out by servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Another sentence, based on a telephone conversation in March 2023, was handed down against a resident of Odessa. That person was sentenced to two years on probation for “unpatriotic and anti-state” conversations on a mobile phone.

A resident of the village of Maly Bobrik in the Sumy region was convicted under Part 1 of Art. 436-2 of the Criminal Code in June 2022 and sentenced to a term of six months in prison because she had, in April 2022, near her yard and in the presence of three persons, expressed approval of the actions of the Russian authorities in relation to Ukraine, and later refused to admit her guilt.

At least 25 Ukrainians have been convicted of “anti-Ukrainian activities” on social media. Nineteen people were found by law enforcement officers in Odnoklassniki and held in the country. According to the investigation, these residents of Ukraine distributed “Z” symbols and Russian flags on their pages and called the invasion “liberation.”

Sentences were also handed down against those who did not distribute such publications, but only “liked” them (i.e., expressed a form of approval on social media). The texts of at least two sentences say that the so-called “likes” had the goal of “bringing the idea to a wide range of people of changing the borders of the territory of Ukraine,” and “justifying the armed aggression of the Russian Federation.” The investigators justified the prosecutions on the grounds that personal pages have open access, and liked publications can be seen by many people.

For instance, in May 2022, in Uman, a pensioner was sentenced to two years in prison with a probationary period of a year for “rejection of the current Ukrainian authorities... on the Odnoklassniki Internet network,” having put down “likes... to a number of publications that justify the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.”

In Kremenchug in May 2022, a citizen of Ukraine was convicted under article 436-2 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. Using a pseudonym, this individual had spoken on the social media platform Odnoklassniki about the Nazis in Ukraine and the development of biological weapons funded by the Pentagon.

The repressive actions carried out by the current government to fight against those who disagree with it have turned Ukraine into the most repressive state in Europe, a state where any person who dares to oppose the authorities, the oligarchy, nationalism and neo-Nazism risks freedom and often even their life.

We ask you to disseminate this information as widely as possible, since in the current situation only wide international publicity about the facts presented in this article can help save thousands of people whose freedom and life are now under serious threat in Ukraine.



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