

An interview with Ukrainian socialist Maxim Goldarb

Clara Weiss
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In this interview, Maxim Goldarb, the head of the Union of Left Forces — For a New Socialism Party (SLS), speaks with the WSWs about the persecution of his party, the growing anti-war sentiments in Ukraine, and the impact of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians on society. His party advocates a negotiated settlement with Russia and has been banned since the beginning of the war. Despite our well-documented political differences with political allies of the SLS party, including the Left Party in Germany, the WSWs has consistently defended the democratic rights of the SLS and calls upon all of its readers to oppose the state-led crackdown on anti-war opposition parties by the NATO-backed Zelensky government. In recent months, the WSWs has published a series of important articles by Goldarb on the domestic situation in Ukraine.

Clara Weiss (CW): Your party is banned in Ukraine and has been persecuted by the government. Can you describe for our international readers the persecution your party has faced and is facing? What is the current situation of those in Ukraine who are demanding an end to this war?

Maxim Goldarb (MG): Along with 12 other opposition parties, the 'Union of Left Forces' party, was banned in Ukraine first by a decision of the Security and Defense Council and a presidential decree (in spring 2022). Then, a similar decision to ban it (essentially a copycat, as with other banned opposition parties) was issued by the Lviv Administrative Court.

It is noteworthy that the ruling was issued in Lviv, not in Kiev, where the party is registered, as would be required by law. According to our information, Lviv courts are under the full control of the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, who is President Zelensky's man, and fulfill any task assigned to them. I would like to emphasize that the SLS is the only party that has not accepted the decision of the authorities.

We appealed in the Constitutional Court of Ukraine against the very law on the basis of which opposition parties were banned in the country, and we appealed in the European Court of Human Rights against the decisions of Ukrainian courts to ban the party. Our complaints are currently under consideration. From the very beginning of the war, the persecution of the opposition began on an 'industrial' scale.

Many members of the SLS have been forced underground, part of the party leadership was forced to leave the country

under the fear of prison and death, absolutely without any legal grounds one of its former leaders and founders was thrown into prison. Practically all the heads of our territorial party organizations have been summoned and interrogated by the Security Service (SB) of Ukraine. The party office in Kiev has been vandalized and documentation and computer equipment was stolen.

As for the situation facing people in Ukraine who are in favor of an immediate end to the conflict and the beginning of peace negotiations, it is extremely dangerous for their life and freedom: they are declared enemies of the state, state traitors, collaborators, and essentially become outlaws. They can be detained, searched, arrested, and held in prisons without judicial decisions for months and even years. Their only fault is that they try to express their point of view, which goes against the policy of the ruling elite and the president. The government has a panic fear of the emergence of a differing opinion society, because it recognizes that this will bring it closer to its own demise.

CW: Different sources put the number of Ukrainians who have already died in this war at between 150,000 and 300,000. This is an absolutely horrifying number, especially for a country, whose population is quite small—it was just under 40 million at the beginning of the war, and is even smaller now. How do you assess the impact of the loss of so many lives on society, on the moods of the population and on the future of the country?

MG: The figures you mentioned are really terrible, although they were mentioned by many in America even before the counteroffensive began, so I suppose they are much higher now. The Ukrainian government keeps these terrible figures secret, but the truth somehow finds its way into the informational space and into society regardless. For example, earlier this year, a Hungarian publication wrote about several refrigerated railroad trucks that filled with the corpses of dead soldiers near the borders of Hungary. I repeat that figures, putting the number losses of at several hundred thousand were also voiced late last year by European politicians, military and public figures (Ursula von der Leyen, for example) as well as American ones ([Robert J.] Kennedy, [Mark] Milley, [Tucker] Carlson, etc.). Thus, I assume, unfortunately, that by now they

are closer to half a million people. Undoubtedly, this will affect the demographic situation in the country, because those have died or become crippled were able-bodied Ukrainian men of reproductive age.

Moreover, we should not forget that during the war at least 5 million Ukrainian women, also able-bodied and mostly of reproductive age, left the country with their children. Most of them have now found jobs abroad, their children have gone to local schools and institutes, they are settling in and adjusting to local customs and rules. Do you think many of them will want to return to the destroyed country? This is a rhetorical question. So, unfortunately, in this sense Ukraine will be devastated. Especially if we take into account that their husbands, too, after the end of hostilities (and any war ends sooner or later) will go to them in order to reunite with their families.

Information about losses, no matter how the authorities try to hide it—by only releasing the bodies one by one, by forbidding to write about the real death toll—clearly enters into everyday conversations: relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, close friends, acquaintances—all of them speak and convey information about cases that they, their relatives or acquaintances experience. And that kind of information is spreading like wildfire.

And this, first of all, affects the desire of men to serve in the army: it is not without reason that a month ago one of the military officers in charge of recruitment for the army wrote that only 20% of all those who are mandated to serve in the army are willing to do so. This is also confirmed by a recent publication of the British Guardian which noted that young people, hearing about the mass deaths of boys at the front, are refusing military service by any means necessary. The protracted war has an equally big impact on the general mood of Ukrainian society, which is growing tired of the war: there is more and more talk about peace, there is more and more distrust expressed in the policy of the president and government. I think that the mass of such voices is not critical yet but, under certain conditions, it will become so within the next year.

CW: In one article for the WSWs, you described the criminal methods deployed by the government for the mobilization. What is the current situation in this regard? And how do you understand Zelensky's dismissal of the heads of military recruitment offices last week?

MG: The situation with mobilization, more precisely with its methods, has not changed for the better, rather, on the contrary, it has worsened. In a recent interview, Oleksyi Arestovych, a former advisor of Zelensky, stated that up to 400,000 more people need to be mobilized! And given my answers above, you can imagine how the authorities will try to force people (of whom only one in five wants to fight) to fight under their banner. The methods will only get worse. Already now in provincial regions and districts cases of have begun to multiply of violent detentions of men both groups and on an individual

basis; of their forcible delivery at gunpoint to military recruitment offices and of them being sent to the front.

Nothing of this sort has happened in Kiev yet: the authorities have traditionally been afraid of creating nervousness in the capital, but soon, I am sure, the same methods will be applied to men in the capital. As for the announced dismissal of military commissars throughout Ukraine, I will answer this way: the president is first and foremost a good, professional, high-quality actor; he has a very good sense of the mood of his audience and constantly tries to get it to applaud him (in the figurative sense in this case).

His decision/statement here is aimed at three different audiences: First, the US authorities - “see how I fight corruption”; Second, ordinary Ukrainians - the same thing plus creating the appearance of a fair and tough leader. Especially given the apparent and well-known dislike of ordinary people for military commissars and other officials who have grown fat. Third, the army, more precisely, its rank and file and the junior commanding staff. He is trying to create an impression of fair treatment of the veterans who fought in this war, by supposedly punishing those who did not fight and the corrupt officers in the rear and military commissars (and combat officers and soldiers always have a negative attitude to 'rear rats'). So this is a form of “flirting” with the army rank and file, which the president badly needs now, given his disagreements with the army top brass. So from this point of view, his firing of the military recruitment officers is very cunning and clever.

CW: You also wrote for the WSWs about the destruction of World War II monuments and the glorification of Bandera and other Ukrainian nationalists and fascists. They are glorified now in the West as well. Can you talk about the role of these forces in the history of Ukraine and their role in today's Ukrainian society?

MG: As a citizen of Ukraine, I regret that people like Bandera and other Nazi collaborators are now elevated to the rank of heroes. This is unfortunately true, but I am sure that this enormous mistake will be radically corrected.

CW: Thank you very much for the interview.



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