

"Everything that we have to experience today is the result of what happened in February 2014"

Ukrainian youth speak on 10 years of the 2014 coup in Kiev

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Last week marked not only the two-year anniversary of the NATO war in Ukraine against Russia but also the ten-year anniversary of the 2014 coup in Kiev that toppled the government of Viktor Yanukovich and installed the pro-NATO government of the “chocolate oligarch” Petro Poroshenko. Poroshenko remained in power until 2019, when Volodymyr Zelensky was elected, in a vote that expressed above all opposition to the 2014 coup and the war course against Russia.

Both events—the coup and the beginning of open war between NATO and Russia—are inseparably interrelated. Ultimately, both are the outcome of the Stalinist destruction of the Soviet Union, which led to the restoration of capitalism and the rule of criminal oligarchies, opening up the entire region to the intervention of imperialism. In the media, this historical background to the war, which has already claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, is continuously being covered up and lied about. Despite the well-documented role of fascist forces such as the Right Sector in the coup, the Maidan protests and the coup itself continue to be falsely presented as a “democratic revolution.” This political and historical lie is a central component of the equally false war propaganda that depicts Ukraine as a beacon of “democracy.”

On the occasion of the anniversary of this event, the WSWs spoke with youth in Ukraine, whose experiences belie the propaganda in the media. Now in their late teens or early twenties, the lives of these youth were shaped by the far-reaching attacks on social and democratic rights of the working class that accompanied the systematic transformation of the country into a launching pad for war with Russia. Their experiences confirm the analysis and warnings advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International and *World Socialist Web Site* at the time about the devastating impact of the coup on the masses of Ukraine and beyond.

One youth, who was only 14 at the time, recalled the initial confusion he and his family experienced as the coup was unfolding in the capital, and the impact these events had on his political consciousness.

At first, of course, I couldn’t understand how to feel about it, I mean, there were some sentiments like: “good, fair, well, to expel this thief of a president.” Well, I mean such emotions were aroused, it seemed that something was even right. But one day, when my grandmother was talking to her relatives from Russia, who asked her about what was going on in the country, she started telling them that it was all the work of the Nazis, which surprised me. I overheard their conversation and I thought: “Why are they Nazis? If they are for their people, if they are patriots, why are

they Nazis?” That was my opinion. Then, at school I learned that these activists demolished the monument to Lenin in Kiev. Immediately, something turned over in my chest, in my soul. I did not understand what kind of figure Vladimir Lenin was, but for me it was unacceptable, because it seemed to be wrong. It was then that I began to have doubts.

From then on, I also lived in Odessa, and, Odessa has traditionally been unquiet. There were many anti-Maidan protests, when people came out to demonstrate with Red flags, with imperial flags, in one column, the so-called communists, in another one the nationalists, in order to show their opposition to the politics of the Kiev junta. For me as someone who was not politically educated and understood very little but was also opposed to this coup, it was like a march of justice. I completely endorsed their efforts to express their disagreement with the Kiev regime. Among my friends there were different views—some were against, some for [the coup]. I mostly tried to surround myself with those who were against and it seemed to me at some point that that was perhaps even the majority of people, but I cannot speak for everyone.

A youth from Zaporizhzhia, a city in southeastern Ukraine, said,

It all started in the late fall-early winter of 2013. At first, I had an intuitive, rather than a rational ideological rejection of the protesters and their demands, [especially] of their ethnic nationalism. In Zaporizhzhia specifically, I did not notice much sympathy for the “revolution of dignity.” At school we tried not to raise the complicated topic of current events. In March 2014, everyone was going to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Ukrainian writer and thinker Taras Shevchenko. However, some time after the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Shevchenko’s birthday it became clear that the majority of students [in my school] were on the side of the post-Maidan Kiev government. There were cases of sympathy for OUN, UPA, Stepan Bandera.

A youth from southern Ukraine, who is now in his early 20s, told the WSWs:

I remember all the events that preceded and were connected with Maidan very well, although 10 years have passed since then. In 2013, there was more and more talk about the course that Ukraine would have to choose. Some people suggested that Ukraine should join the Customs Union [with Russia], while others suggested that Ukraine should join the European Union.

I first heard about the beginning of the Maidan on the radio; the presenter congratulated the listeners on the beginning of the new Maidan. Immediately after I heard about this news, I rushed to the TV to double-check what I had heard. On the TV screen I saw students with Ukrainian and EU flags demanding Ukraine's accession to the EU. I took this news with the surprise and interest that you would expect from a young person of my age (14 years old).

But was I even surprised by what was happening?

Well, as far as I can remember, no, I was not.

At that time I subscribed to many newspapers and followed the events that were taking place closely. I remember the hype about the Maidan crackdown with footage of the beatings and the news that the corpse of a hanged man, who would later be numbered among the Heavenly Hundred, was found on an iron structure that was to be the frame for a Christmas tree on the Maidan.

On December 8, 2013, bourgeois nationalists demolished and smashed a monument to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin by the Soviet sculptor Merkulov, which had stood for many decades in Kiev. This act of vandalism was covered by all the media outlets. The more participants went to Maidan and came back, the more stories circulated. Former participants told about how they stood on Maidan for money, how much they were paid and how much clothes and things they were given, how Maidan stank and how they would like to go back again to earn money.

In late January 2014, we learned about two people killed from the Maidan side and footage was shown of Molotov cocktails flying towards the Berkut [headquarters—the Berkut are special forces, controlled by the Interior Ministry]. As far as I remember, in January or February, Prime Minister Mykola Azarov resigned and Serhiy Arbuzov took his place. Around the same time, there was talk of Yanukovych stepping down and new presidential elections were scheduled. And then, later in February, shooting was opened on Maidan participants, in which not only they, but also supporters of the government were killed. At the same time, the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, fled the country. No one in my family supported Euromaidan and now it is well understood that all the events that are happening [with the war] now, they started with it [the coup].

He continued,

After February 2014, the political climate changed dramatically. For a whole period, violence became law. The period leading up to the Ukrainian presidential election [of May 2014] was particularly frightening. The political climate in my school changed above all with the beginning of the war [the civil war in East Ukraine]. I remember well how my classmates were asked to donate money for the war and were also asked to donate things to the soldiers. The scariest time for me out of these past 10 years were the first three months after Maidan. They were frightening and it was not known how long all of this would last. Maidan entailed a new wave of “decommunization,” it affected not only Lenin monuments and images of Soviet symbols, but above all history.

I belong to the generation that still had time to learn at school about the war from 1941 to 1945, which was called the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union. By the 70th anniversary of the Victory it was already forbidden to call this war by its old name—the “Great Patriotic War”—it was now necessary to call it the Second World War. May 9 as Victory Day was not canceled, but instead of it they started to celebrate May 8 [This is the day of the official celebrations in Western Europe, as opposed to May 9 in Russia]. Instead of the St. George ribbon [a sign commemorating the war in Russia], a new symbol in the form of a poppy flower, was to be worn. I remember in history class the teacher announced that the war would be called World War II. I and some of my classmates took it as a disgrace and started yelling “yuck!” Our teacher did not support this decision either and advised everyone to read the book *They Fought for Their Country* by the Soviet writer Sholokhov.

The youth from Odessa recalled,

What now began was the struggle against everyone who thought differently. It was a struggle for the complete destruction and elimination of any and all alternative views. They were presented as treacherous, anti-Ukrainian, pro-Russian, even if they were not really pro-Russian but, in fact, anti-oligarchic. We all understand very well that for the regime in Kiev this term, “pro-Russian,” has worked very well whenever it was necessary to take revenge on ordinary people. In the schools there was of course still the old staff of teachers, which, in its views, was, I would say, against the policies of Kiev. But of course everyone kept quiet, everyone stuck to what came down from the Ministry of Education. I will not even speak about how history was taught—it was readjusted with every school year, the terms and narratives were changed constantly. The goal was to present all of Ukrainian history as a history of oppression by the Russians, and to present the Bolsheviks and communists as evil. The Ukrainian communists, we were told, were also Russian and that [the Soviet period] was also [part of] the Russian yoke.

Alongside the glorification of fascist forces and the destruction of Soviet-era monuments, the governments of first Poroshenko and then Zelensky implemented far-reaching austerity measures that impoverished a working class that had already been battered by the impact of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

By 2021, Ukraine vied with Moldova, another former Soviet republic, for the dubious rank of the poorest country of Europe. The mass immiseration intensified a wave of emigration. In the words of one youth in Transcarpathia, “There was a huge wave of labor migrants abroad. People left the country en masse before the war to search for employment in neighboring countries, including in Russia.”

Because of the civil war in East Ukraine, which had claimed up to 15,000 lives by 2022, millions were internally displaced. By March 2016, officially, 1.6 million Ukrainians had been internally displaced and over 1 million had fled abroad, aggravating an already significant depopulation crisis.

The youth from Odessa said, “I will say that our Odessa region was the only region that did not cut social benefits for [internal] migrants, the only region that continued to help migrants from Donbass and Lugansk [regions in the East of Ukraine that were controlled by pro-Russian separatists].”

Workers and especially pensioners were hit hard by high levels of inflation. He explained, “Let’s say, if a grandmother had a pension of 100 dollars under Yanukovich, then it was reduced to 70 dollars under Poroshenko and prices increased a lot. Well, what can I say, it’s clear to everyone that nothing good happened.”

One youth said,

Of course there was more unemployment, miserably low wages, an inhumane attitude toward workers on the job, toward the working class. There was a lot of discontent with the government, everyone understood very well that the course had not been changed. People voted for Zelensky because they hoped that he would put an end to the policies of Poroshenko, but he betrayed them. He was just like [Poroshenko] and even worse, so there was overwhelming anger with the government. The government of Zelensky was on its last legs, but the war of 2022 suddenly made all of these sentiments go away, or, let’s just say, people shut up abruptly.

Another youth from southern Ukraine also stressed that before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022,

The people of Ukraine were clearly dissatisfied with what had happened in all the years since Maidan and, first of all, many Ukrainians wanted the war [in the East] to end as soon as possible. And they all supported the parties of those politicians who promised to end the war. Parties such as Medvedchuk’s party, Boyko and Rabinovich’s party, Oleksandr Vilkul’s party, Yevgeniya Muraeva’s party. I met many people who were in favor of ending the war. Many Ukrainians were outraged at the constantly falling standard of living. Pensioners were outraged by the prices for essential food, medicines and payment for utilities. They were especially dissatisfied with the size of the pensions they did receive. I knew then and know now many pensioners who worked more than 40 years and receive a pension that does not reach the amount of 3000 hryvnias [less than \$78].

As pensioners themselves told me, they do not feel like they “live.” Rather, they scrape by during their last years on a small pension, while helping their grandchildren and children, gradually saving for their funerals. Even before the war, young people could not find work in their towns and villages, they were forced to go abroad to work there. The COVID pandemic further aggravated the situation in the country. Rallies were held all over Ukraine. These rallies were attended not only by layers of the petty bourgeoisie, but also by doctors who had not been paid for a long time. Support for Zelensky was fading rapidly before the war.

He concluded,

Not only I, but also many other Ukrainians believe that everything that we have to experience today is the result of what happened in February 2014. All the problems that have fallen on our heads as Ukrainian workers, youth and pensioners are associated with that event. Only the Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists and those whom they serve, as well as the deceived Ukrainian youth, who have been treated as cannon fodder, can think that they have achieved something good with Maidan. I can

only say one thing, that Maidan did not give me anything good. It made the tragic fate of the people even more tragic.

For a compilation of the most important statements by the WSWs on the 2014 coup and its aftermath, review this topic page.



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