

Resistance to war grows among soldiers and civilians in Ukraine

Ukrainian journalists
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This report was submitted to the World Socialist Web Site by journalists of the Ukrainian outlet assembly.org.ua. The journalists, who have been forced underground, have endorsed the campaign to free the Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk and earlier gave an interview to the WSWS. To support their work, please click here.

“A premonition of civil war” is in the air of Ukraine. Following the change of the military registration law, according to official information, 4.6 million people updated their military registration data in the two-month period up to July 17. At least 6 million others “are subject to automatic administrative liability.” This means, in administrative language, that half of the country’s male population finds itself practically in a state of illegality.

Just as we published our July 15 analysis of dozens of direct street actions against the forced mobilization since the beginning of this year, the country was shaken by another such clash: on the evening of July 14, in the Odessa region, border guards stopped a car with four recruits who had escaped from a training battalion. One of these recruits, who had been mobilized just a month earlier, allegedly began to strangle a border guard and was shot dead. Already the next night, in the first hours of the 15th, someone threw a grenade into an enlistment office in the Zolochiv district of the Lviv region (only the windows and the facade were damaged). Finally, on the evening of July 19, the fascist politician Iryna Farion was assassinated in Lviv.

The shooting of Farion, one of the most scandalous far-right opinion leaders in Ukraine, was the first street murder of a politician since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion. Even her opponents began to speak anxiously about the threat that the imperialist proxy war in Ukraine might result in a civil war. The 18-year-old suspect Vyacheslav Zinchenko, an adherent of the National-Socialism/White Power party (NS/WP), was detained on July 25 in the city of Dniepr. He had allegedly planned to join the army later. In the manifesto of this “autonomous revolutionary racist” that appeared in neo-Nazi channels, Farion was accused of inciting hatred between white people and is called an internal enemy, while the Ukrainian military is described as fighting an external enemy.

One day before the arrest of Zinchenko, 32-year-old Mikhail Tonkonogov, a well-known volunteer and chairman of the city’s auto carriers union, was found dead in a forest belt near the same Dniepr. The police claim that on July 22 he met with two residents aged 23 and 39, as a result of the conflict they killed him with six shots and buried the body. They were detained and were suspected of premeditated murder by prior agreement. According to another version of the events, Tonkonogov was killed over unpaid debt: auto transportation in Ukraine is a very corrupt business, and it is well known that refusing to pay someone at the top for the opportunity can cost one’s life. Perhaps this is why his murder did not provoke a big response in society.

These assassinations have taken place as there are growing signs of a disintegration of the army at the front.

In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising that on June 19, the bill No. 6569-d on the establishment of the military police in Ukraine to combat desertion and disciplinary violations was adopted in the first reading. In order to at least partially ease tensions in society, on July 16, the Ukrainian parliament also voted in the first reading in favor of bill No. 11322, under which a serviceman who has left his unit without authorization (Ukrainian abbreviation: SZCh) or deserted for the first time will be able to return to service with all payments and support without facing criminal charges. If a soldier who left without authorization now wants to return, his return must be approved by the commander. A lawyer from Kharkov who communicates a lot with the military and security forces told us:

There are more than 100,000 trained people there, they want to bring them back. It is more profitable to agitate for their return. But in what form will it take place?... If there are good conditions, at least 40 percent will return. Because they fled due to the stupidity of their commanders. If they are treated humanely, many will return. The main issue is their provision. Many will want to avoid being brought in by force and being enrolled in assault battalions of prisoners.

Other sources in Kharkov told us the following:

Many resort to SZCh because of the indifference at the top, whatever the warnings and intimidation.

I have two friends in SZCh from Saltovka, they tried to resolve the dismissal through lawyers and it did not work. They were tired of getting it, they saw everything with their own eyes. Often the command ignores the treatment of the soldiers, they do not return to duty [when discharged] from hospital.

My godfather has already finished fighting. He went on vacation and did not come back. Everyone is fed up with everything. He called the commander and told him, he was not surprised. He lives in his apartment, according to his registration, so far no one has even come. He fought for a year and a half, that’s enough.

My brother came back from Toretsk without a leg, and those who were with him didn’t come back, they shoved him into a minibus in the evening, in the morning he was already in Dniepr... They packed him up a little over a month ago, brought him to the hospital in Vinnitsa a week ago. He didn’t stay in training for long, [only] two weeks. He didn’t try to get out of there. I think if it was real, then everyone who was forced into it would have escaped. There are no more patriots, of those in my family who went on their own in [20]22, three are already [buried] in the ground, one is missing. But when they were home for leave, they all said that you have nothing to do there [at the front]!!!

(For the sources of these quotes, see our articles “SZCh as a new trend,”

“The time for fragging?” and “Totalitarianism, heat, July”)

And on August 6, the following question was raised in the largest Telegram chat that provides aid for those seeking to escape the country:

They are going to take a friend of mine abroad for training at the end of the month. After he was thrown there by force, of course, he did not become a patriot and wants to get out. They are bringing him to Britain, they are going to put him on an aircraft. They will transport him through Poland, any ideas on how he can get out? Need to have someone else's experience, or your own, if you have it.

One of the moderators answered the following:

There were cases when people left right on the road in Poland. It is possible to leave in any country... Only in the last half year, I have spoken with people who left while in Slovakia, Germany, Poland and Britain (but their further fate is unknown there). Let him try to leave on the road in Poland, by all means.

There have been cases of severe violence directed by the military and border authorities against those trying or just suspected of trying to flee military service. The fate of 20-year-old Lviv student Olexandr Gashevsky is particularly tragic. At 9 a.m. on July 14, he boarded a shuttle bus in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, returning from a mountain walk near the Carpathian village of Verkhovyna. When the bus left, the student called his parents and said: “I’m on the bus, I’m going back.” After the bus was stopped by the servicemen of the local TCR [Territorial Center for Recruitment and Social Support, the agency that enacts the mobilization], the young man was forcibly removed from the bus, seriously injured, loaded into a Volkswagen T4 with military license plates, and taken to an unknown direction. At the same time, his phone was turned off and the contact was lost. Two weeks later, the body of the kidnapped boy was found in the border river of Tisza. The parents’ lawyer expressed a version of the possible circumstances: “The young man could have been beaten either by border guards or employees of the TCR. After the severe beating, he was not provided with medical aid, instead he was taken to the TCR in Ivano-Frankivsk region to formalize the case,” said Oleg Veremiyenko.

The mother of the deceased said:

The body is in such a state that it is unrecognizable. That’s why we need to conduct a DNA examination, the results of which will have to wait a month. There was only one shoe on the body when it was found. There was no passport and no phone in the purse, only a charger. There was also student ID. Already on July 30, they called us and asked if he was really a student.

According to his parents, their son did not even know how to swim. The authorities claim that neither the military, nor the National Guard nor the police detained Olexandr or checked his documents.

There are also more and more reports of outbursts of violence by desperate soldiers against their commanders. On April 6, in the Kherson region, a sergeant in the Ukrainian army fired at his commander (with the rank of major) after he refused to give him leave. The bullet hit the ceiling, no one was hurt. The shooter had his automatic rifle taken away

and was sent to a psychiatric center. He managed to escape on the way, it is unknown whether he has been found.

A Ukrainian army instructor told one of the main political Telegram channels of Ukraine about mass desertion from the training unit. In a post from July 17, he said:

A couple of months ago, reinforcements arrived—seafarers were taken off the ships and sent to serve in the marines. These are contractors, whom at the beginning of the war, when signing a contract, the Ukrainian Navy command promised that they would serve only on ships. But recently, the command removed personnel from several ships at once. They were transferred to marine brigades. On the way from the ships to training, some of these guys escaped. Almost none of the escapees were found. I think that many have already fled from Ukraine.

The location of the events is not specified. However, since we are talking about mid-May, it is likely that the events took place as Ukrainian troops were hastily pulling together reserves to stop the Russian offensive north of Kharkov. Marines of the 36th brigade are now fighting there.

The Telegram channel of the Atesh movement, which works for Ukrainian military intelligence in Crimea, wrote on July 15 about the 810th marine brigade from Sevastopol:

After numerous failures in Krynyi, part of the brigade has already advanced to the Kharkov section of the front. Due to heavy losses in the Kherson direction, more than 100 people refused to take part in further combat operations. The wounded are left in hospitals in Henichesk and Skadovsk. They do not have time to fill the staff with new people, and the command reports 75% of the brigade’s combat readiness.

If seafarers from both sides refused to shoot at each other, can this be considered a kind of remote fraternization?

The politician and government propagandist Oleksyi Arestovich, who is close to the presidential office of Volodymyr Zelensky, described the state of the army as follows in an interview on June 22:

I can give you an example: on one of the key sections of the front, the day before yesterday, six battalions refused to carry out a combat mission. Six. Do you think this is the only case? Do you think this will not happen again, do you think it will not escalate? This is not the case. Despite all the Western aid, because at the root lies the wrong attitude towards people, and people repay—how?—with disloyalty. It is the same as 100 years ago. When 5 thousand Bolsheviks [in fact, there were also a lot of anarchists and left socialists revolutionaries among them,—Ed.] were marching on Kiev, there were one-and-a-half million soldiers in Ukraine with [combat] experience from the First World War... Why didn’t they come out, why did only 300 students come out? One-and-a-half million veterans! Heroes, as we say today. No one lifted a finger, [only] the students went. Because the government [of that time] had pursued such a policy, ... that no one cared about it, there was no loyalty, no one wanted to protect it. We are going down exactly the same path—look at the number of people entering military schools, look at the number of those who refuse.

According to Arestovich, the recruitment of future officers in the Ukrainian army is less than half of the set target, a figure that, in his words, is “very small for the largest European state.”

The situation in the rear is also becoming ever more tense. In our earlier study of violent clashes between civilians and patrols that seek to forcibly mobilize men, we have recorded about 40 cases from the beginning of this year until mid-summer: from night grenade attacks on enlistment torturers to mass riots or individual armed resistance to the kidnappers. People use knives, spray cans, heavy blunt objects, on June 4 even threw tomatoes at visitors during a raid on a market in Kherson. At the same time, the survey did not include the equally regular arsons of relay cabinets, electrical substations and military vehicles—not only Ukrainian security forces, but also a number of independent sources link them to Russian recruiters of easy money seekers on Telegram and criminals.

Since the publication of this study, more events have taken place in this “social war in the rear”: Odessa, known for its traditions of working class militancy, is especially rich in news. On July 19, a crowd of passers-by blocked the road at Privoz, preventing the police from detaining a driver who had allegedly failed to stop at a checkpoint. In the scrimmage, the cop’s uniform was torn off, he was left naked to the waist. He then fired a pistol into the air and attacked an elderly woman with pepper spray. The following week, in the suburban village of Tairovo, a local deputy allegedly got beaten for helping to distribute military draft notices, and in Odessa, someone reportedly burned a neighbor’s Suzuki because he wore a swastika tattoo.

If we take seriously the statements of the Ukrainian authorities about their readiness for negotiations with Russia, so long-awaited by a significant part of Ukrainian society, the widely announced autumn counteroffensive and the total mobilization make no more sense at all. And even if these negotiations will not take place, the talk about them will inevitably undermine the motivation of the troops. The soldiers, naturally, will ask themselves: what is the point of mass deaths on the threshold of negotiations? Moreover, the forced mobilization on the streets for the planned breakthrough on the front by means of superiority in manpower becomes meaningless. It will make draft dodgers even more convinced of the need to hide from the authorities, as they will believe that there is not much time left that they have to wait. Therefore, no matter what tricks are standing behind such statements by the authorities, combined with the disastrous situation at the front, they portend an even more serious growth of anti-war resistance both at the front and in the rear. The process is developing in accordance with our winter forecast that 2024 will be a key year for the formation of a revolutionary situation where, as in World War I, soldiers and working class civilians on both sides increasingly tire of the war and move toward fraternization.



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