

Anti-corruption protests shake Zelensky regime

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Thousands protested in cities across Ukraine last week following the passage of a law placing the country's National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) under direct control of the right-wing regime of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The protests were the largest to take place in Ukraine since the beginning of the NATO-backed proxy war with Russia that began in February 2022 and defied the country's ongoing martial law status. In contrast to earlier and smaller protests by relatives of soldiers demanding that their husbands, brothers and sons be allowed to return from the front, these protests were widely covered in the pro-imperialist media, which made no reference to the immense human toll of the war.

Protesters carried posters with slogans such as "Corruption kills," "Ukraine is not Russia" and "My father is not fighting for this." The protests were dominated by layers of the middle and upper-middle classes, which have largely been shielded from the brutality of the war, either through education deferments or bribing themselves out of forced conscription.

In 2014, these layers, the prop of Ukraine's so-called "civil society," combined with the violent intervention of the country's far-right paramilitary groups such as the Azov Battalion and Right Sector, were mobilized for the overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovych in the Western-backed coup. In recent years, they have been an important prop of the Zelensky regime. Several commentators have already likened the protests to the 2014 Maidan protests with Holocaust scholar Marta Havryshko raising the question "Will Zelensky become his own Maidan?" in the German *Berliner Zeitung*.

The agency over which the conflict developed, NABU, was set up in the wake of that coup, which triggered an eight-year-long civil war in East Ukraine, leading up to Russia's invasion in February 2022. Founded in 2015 by

the right-wing nationalist government of Petro Poroshenko, NABU is almost entirely created and directed by the US. Its staff is trained directly by the FBI and European Union.

In 2020, the former Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Viktor Shokin, complained that NABU was created by order of then US Vice President Joe Biden in order to undermine Ukraine's own State Bureau of Investigation and "put there emissaries who listen to the United States."

Throughout its existence, NABU has played a key role in the ongoing conflicts within the Ukrainian oligarchy and state apparatus.

In March of 2023, Zelensky appointed Semen Kryvonos as the head of NABU, with much fanfare and claims that Zelensky and the Ukrainian government were finally getting tough on "corruption," as demanded by the EU and US. Kryvonos reportedly has close ties to Zelensky's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, one of the most influential figures in contemporary Ukrainian politics.

Zelensky, under conditions in which his regime is in serious crisis despite its recent reconciliation with the Trump administration, had now clearly tried to establish complete control of the agency to remove any potential political adversaries such as Poroshenko.

According to Zelensky, stripping the agency of its independence was necessary to combat "Russian influence." A day prior, Ukraine's security services (SBU) had carried out raids of the agency to supposedly arrest Russian spies.

But the naked power grab was a step too far for Ukraine's European backers, who regularly employ "anti-corruption" campaigns as a means of directly intervening in Ukraine's oligarchic politics.

Following the law's passage on July 22, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul wrote on X that "limiting the independence of anti-corruption agencies hampers Ukraine's way towards the EU."

According to EU spokesperson Guillaume Mercier, the EU directly intervened in the controversy, telling *Politico*, “The president of the European Commission was in contact with President Zelenskyy about these latest developments. President von der Leyen conveyed her strong concerns about the consequences of the amendments, and she requested the Ukrainian government [provide] explanations.”

“The respect for the rule of law and the fight against corruption are core elements of the European Union. As a candidate country, Ukraine is expected to uphold these standards fully. There cannot be a compromise,” Mercier added.

Following the domestic protests and foreign outcry, Zelensky appeared to backtrack, introducing a new bill last Thursday that he claims will restore NABU’s independence.

However, Zelensky failed to provide details on the text of the bill apart from calling it “well-balanced.” NABU itself stated that the new bill “restored all procedural powers and guarantees of independence” of the two agencies.

Zelensky, a former comedian with no military background, is viewed with disdain by Ukraine’s far-right, who play an essential role in the Ukrainian state and especially in conducting the country’s ongoing war with Russia. Should Zelensky completely alienate the educated middle and upper-middle classes and his EU backers, it may well be the final nail in the coffin of a regime already in profound crisis.

In a recent Substack post, veteran journalist Seymour Hersh reported that officials in Washington are actively planning to have ex-commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhny installed to replace Zelensky. Zaluzhny has extensive ties to the country’s far-right and is an open admirer of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera. He has been the ambassador to the UK since his dismissal by Zelensky and, in that capacity, has openly attacked Zelensky’s war strategy.

In yet another indication that the imperialist powers are actively considering the removal of the Zelensky administration, the *Financial Times*, the principal mouthpiece of British finance capital, published a lengthy article on Zelensky’s chief adviser Andriy Yermak last week. Yermak is widely considered something of a shadow president and has wielded immense influence in the Zelensky regime. Citing numerous former leading Ukrainian, US and EU officials, the article stressed that Yermak was centrally involved in the removal of Zaluzhny and the former foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba,

as well as Zelensky’s most recent government reshuffle.

According to the *Financial Times*, “Yermak has managed the unusual feat of irking US politicians on both sides of the aisle, according to current and former officials in Kyiv and Washington, a bipartisan achievement few can boast of and not the kind worth celebrating in Kyiv.”

The escalation of the conflict within the oligarchy and the protests come amidst an intense political crisis and growing social discontent. A recent poll showed that 70 percent of Ukrainians believe that their leaders use the war, which is estimated to have cost hundreds of thousands of lives already, to enrich themselves. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens, such as the Trotskyist youth leader Bogdan Syrotiuk, have been imprisoned, thousands of Ukrainian men have been dragged to the front by press gangs and over 6.8 million people have fled the country, the majority of whom will never return.

Under these conditions, last week’s protests may well portend a much broader movement by workers against the Zelensky regime and the war. However, given the bitter lessons of the 2014 Maidan coup and the transformation of Ukraine into an imperialist proxy for war against Russia, it is essential that workers and young people in Ukraine develop their opposition to the Zelensky regime and the war in complete independence from all factions of the oligarchy and the imperialist powers, based on the demand for unity with the working class in Russia, throughout Europe and the US.



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