Ukraine: Protests against Azov-controlled detention center shed light on boiling tensions

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On November 2, 100 to 200 people gathered to protest a detention center controlled by the neo-Nazi Azov unit within the Ukrainian National Guard in Petropavlivska Borshchahivka, a suburb of the capital Kiev. Earlier, posts had circulated on social media indicating that soldiers were being tortured at the site. One man was alleged to have been tortured and held in the basement there for 37 days. A young boy, believed to be 14 years old, was photographed as he was led out of the detention center in a state of shock.

The protests quickly escalated. While pro-Kiev media reported that some individuals attacked police officers, a former Ukrainian military intelligence officer has since issued a statement, bragging that his men were deployed against the protesters. In the video, Ivan Pylypchuk, known as "Zalizniak," bluntly explained that he organized and led columns of paramilitary thugs who, citing the the Prayer of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists which collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, marched into the protesters, beating up and dispersing them.

Neither Pylypchuk nor any of his thugs were arrested. Instead, police arrested several protesters and at least two women who helped alert the crowd to the detention center.

What occurred at the site still remains unclear and, given the cover-up by the authorities, it is unlikely the full truth will emerge anytime soon. However, evidence points to severe abuse and even torture of soldiers, including possible deserters, at the hands of Azov. Not even Ukrainian authorities denied that at least four of the men found at the site had been severely injured. They have all been hospitalized.

One member of the Ukrainian parliament, Anna Skorokhod, has since confirmed that the four men had been severely beaten at the facility. One of them, Andriy Kuleshov, had reportedly undergone major surgery and an abdominal stoma before being held there. Another, Oleksandr Perminov, was beaten for going absent without official leave (AWOL)—something tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have been doing to escape near certain death at the front. Azov, for its part, is a neo-fascist organization that has been deeply integrated into the Ukrainian military and the state. Notorious for its extreme violence, it now officially forms part of the Ukrainian National Guard.

Its ideology draws from contemporary neo-Nazism and the legacy of World War II-era Nazi collaborators in Ukraine around the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. For well over a decade, it has been built up and armed by both NATO and the Ukrainian state as a central prop of the war against Russia.

The protests and their violent suppression shed a sharp light on boiling social and political tensions in Ukraine over the war. Over the past year, videos and pictures of the violent abduction of men, young and old, from the streets to force them into the army have been going viral. In many cases, the men are seized and beaten by the Military Recruitment officers, who then drag them into vans. Increasingly, these violent abductions have provoked opposition. Many videos show local residents seeking to help the men and prevent them from being kidnapped.

Limited as it was, the protest at Petropavlivska Borshchahivka has provoked concern in Kiev and European capitals. The pro-Kiev media in Ukraine and abroad has gone into overdrive to deny charges of torture as pro-Russian propaganda and discredit the protesters.

With hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Ukrainians killed and maimed in a war that has now

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already lasted almost half a decade, anger and fatigue with the war are becoming an ever more dominant feature of all aspects of social life in Ukraine. The growing signs of unrest within the Ukrainian population coincide with an eruption of popular anger among workers and youth across Europe, where the imperialist powers, with Germany in the lead, have reacted to the recent shifts in US foreign policy by ramping up their own militarization and involvement in the war. In France and Germany, the protests against austerity and the reintroduction of the draft have begun to give voice to mass anti-war sentiments. Acutely aware that the entire war effort hinges on the intensifying exploitation and suppression of the working class in both Ukraine and the imperialist countries, the Kiev regime is receiving the full backing of NATO in its crackdown.

This summer, the 27-year old Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk was sentenced to 15 years in prison for alleged “treason under martial law” after a trial in which the prosecution failed, on every level, to deliver any evidence to substantiate the charges. The case was built on articles by the *World Socialist Web Site* which, in fact, documented Syrotiuk’s Marxist opposition to both the Putin regime’s invasion of Ukraine, and the Zelensky regime. In Germany, where Zelensky is regularly paraded as as a “bulwark” of European democracy in the media, not a single major party or newspaper has covered the case.

In addition to ever more overt opposition from below, there are also growing signs of cracks within the Ukrainian political and state elite. Last week, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Prosecutor General’s Office charged Iuliia Mendel, Zelensky’s former press secretary, with “state treason” in absentia, accusing of her of “information and subversive activities against Ukraine” and “justifying the Kremlin regime and the full-scale war.” On Twitter/X and other channels, Mendel has for many months criticized the openly dictatorial measures of the Zelensky regime. Recently, she made a pitch to far-right layers in the US and Germany, appearing on the podcast of right-wing US media personality Tucker Carlson and events by the German neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), to accuse Zelensky of preventing “peace” with Russia.

For workers and young people in Ukraine and across Europe, the central task is to consciously fuse opposition to austerity and war internationally and root this movement in a socialist program, aimed at overthrowing capitalism and unifying the continent on a socialist basis.

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