

Counter-revolution and Resistance in Ukraine

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The horrific pogrom in Odessa, where at least 42 people died at the hands of forces linked to the post-coup regime in Kyiv, proves beyond a shadow of a doubt the ultra-reactionary character of Ukraine's present rulers. The 'Maidan Revolution' was in fact a Maidan counterrevolution, which put into power a coalition of right-wing nationalists (neoliberal agents of the West) a fascist front party (Svoboda) and a coalition of fascist militias (Right Sector) who have been given a major role in the new regime's forces of order. The purpose of the government is to subordinate the whole of Ukraine to the exploitation of Western European and North American capital and to enforce this across the entire territory of Ukraine by fascist and police terror, until all resistance is crushed. The fascists are the backbone of the ongoing onslaught against the cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

The independence of Ukraine from the stronger, Western, bloc of imperialist powers now rests with the resistance in the South and East. Pursuing its own interests, Russian imperialism poses as the friend of this resistance, but it is a false friend and a treacherous ally. The Geneva agreements with the Western imperialists, the support for the May 25 elections, the opposition to the May 11 referendum, show that Putin's goal is a rapprochement, particularly with the EU and German imperialism, an agreement to share Ukraine with them. His problem is that the USA and its agents in the EU (Britain, Poland etc) are blocking any sort of compromise and appear willing to give unconditional support to Kyiv's repression, even though this clearly runs the danger of civil war, fascist pogroms and even military clashes between nuclear armed states or at least a New Cold War situation..

However, with their calls for secession and requests to join the Russian Federation, the leaders of the Donetsk Republic are charting a dangerous and adventurist course that will alienate a large part of the population who are Ukrainian in their national identity and/or language. Likewise, it will cut the eastern resistance off from the potential of overthrowing the junta in Kyiv, whose popularity will wane rapidly when it tries to implement the EU - IMF austerity measures. Nonetheless, while this dangerously wrong policy should be frankly criticised, it should not alter or condition the necessary international support by the workers' movement for the antifascist resistance forces in Ukraine.

The resistance of the Russian-speaking and most strongly working class areas of Ukraine arises in part from a justified fear of what the chauvinists who rule in Kyiv might do in terms of language and cultural rights, that is, the fear of national oppression. However, it also comes from a correct apprehension of what the EU 'reforms' and the severing of economic ties to Russia would mean for their jobs and communities. The declarations of city and regional autonomy and, above all, the refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the Maidan regime, are totally justified.

In contrast to the situation in Crimea, there is little evidence that the people of these areas want to separate from Ukraine, or are pro-Russian in the sense of wishing to join the Russian Federation. What they have made very clear is that they do not want to be ruled by a regime that has no democratic

legitimacy, rests on lawless gangs of thugs and does not hide its hatred of Ukraine's Russian speaking citizens. Atrocities by the Right Sector gangs, such as those in Odessa and Mariupol, have led to mutinies amongst the police and armed forces and popular street mobilisations, while the siege of Slavyansk and the protest strikes by miners and steel workers are further proof of the popular antifascist resistance. This resistance deserves, and needs, the support of workers and socialists worldwide.

The intervention of the US and EU imperialist powers is a highly dangerous provocation from the point of view of the genuine interests not only of all Ukrainians but also of the workers and middle classes of Europe and North America. It is part of their more general policy of an aggressive militarised offensive against their Russian imperialist rival. Although Russia is much weaker in all respects than the USA, and, economically, weaker than the EU, Western policy has allowed Putin to pose as the defender of the Russian speaking population of Ukraine. However, their interests are completely subordinate to his strategic goal which is to maintain a buffer between Russian territory and NATO's already advanced front line. If Eastern Ukrainians put their fate in his hands, they are heading for catastrophe.

To date, Russia's actions have been responses to the increasingly belligerent initiatives from the West both on the diplomatic front, with the attempt to defuse the crisis by the formation of an interim government, and militarily, with 'field exercises' and troop movements near the Ukrainian border. Even in the aftermath of the Odessa pogrom and the siege of Slavyansk, Russia appears to have limited itself to support for local militia and threats of more direct intervention only in the event of an escalation by the Kyiv regime. Despite this, the western media is positively totalitarian in its endorsement of Obama, Merkel, Cameron and Hollande's 'narrative' that Ukraine has somehow opted for absorption into the Western imperialists' sphere of influence and this is only being obstructed by Russian intervention and agitation.

The fact that 'democratic' governments in North America and Western Europe did not turn a hair at either the fascist presence in government or at the atrocities committed in Odessa, and are willing to countenance even greater ones that might be committed if they succeed in overcoming the resistance in the East, reflects a new period in world capitalism, which began with the onset of the deep recession in 2007-08. It marks the definitive end of the 'phony peace' of the 1990s and 2000s, a peace that, in any case, did not extend to the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, and was marked by remorseless attempts to pluck the fruits of the 'West's' victory over 'Communism'.

This new political period is marked by increasing inter-imperialist rivalry. A supremely aggressive USA and its British shield bearer, pulling in a more hesitant German-led European Union, and an increasingly bellicose Japan, are bent on encircling and intimidating the recently graduated members of the imperialist club; Russia and China. As well as the advance of NATO military forces into Eastern Europe, they are using the 'soft power' of human rights NGOs, democracy movements and 'colour' revolutions, to undermine the resistance of their rivals.

This situation demands not only solidarity with the antifascist resistance in Ukraine but also the revitalisation of the antiwar movement, which mobilised millions against the US and Nato war drive in Afghanistan and Iraq. It also means exposing as fraudulent any claim that 'Ukraine' is some sort of special victim of Russian imperialism and that this justifies government attacks on the majority Russian speaking areas because they will not accept the coup-regime's authority.

The character of the Maidan movement

The movement that came to be called 'Euromaidan' was initiated by a coalition of nationalists (Batkivshchyna - Fatherland) neoliberals (Udar - Fist) and a fascist front party (Svoboda - Freedom) with the aim of forcing Viktor Yanukovich's government to sign the EU Association Agreement. This coalition

faced no rival leadership, and consolidated its control through its 'Headquarters of National Resistance', a name that clearly asserted its self-identification with 'the nation'. Indeed, Ukrainian nationalism was the pre-dominant ideology from the beginning. It served a number of reactionary purposes. Firstly, it unified oligarchs, bourgeois opposition parties, middle class sectors and parts of the impoverished strata under a single ideological chimera. Secondly, it served to sideline social and working class demands. Thirdly, it encouraged and legitimised the participation of fascist and far-right forces. Fourthly, it automatically alienated large parts of the Ukrainian population and working class, in particular, Russians and Russian-speakers and other minorities. At the same time, the predominance of nationalism and the absence of progressive social demands also meant that the movement could never mobilise the majority of the Ukrainian working class, which remained passive.

The Association Agreement itself was a neoliberal trade agreement that would have imposed an IMF-controlled 'shock therapy' with the aim of decisively subordinating the whole of Ukraine to the Western imperialist sphere of exploitation. The EU had been pressuring Yanukovich to sign it for a long time, using the threat of imminent insolvency after repayment of IMF loans as a form of blackmail. Equally, Russia had been using the massive gas-payment debts and threatened withdrawal of subsidised prices as a means to pressure Yanukovich's regime to orient towards the 'Customs Union' established with Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The US and EU-based NGO's and 'pro-democracy' foundations openly funded, encouraged and even participated in, the Maidan movement, just as they had the 'Orange Revolution' that led to the unstable regime of Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko. It was not, at first, a mass movement but only became so as a result of repression from the Yanukovich government's special forces (11 December, 22 January). Even then, there were only relatively short periods when it attracted hundreds of thousands. It was correct for working class and socialist activists to intervene into the movement as it grew, supporting any progressive demands for democratic rights, protesting against repression and the Oligarchs (all of them) but it was also essential for them to challenge the reactionary ethnic-nationalist and pro-EU neoliberal policies of the leadership by raising social demands.

However, those Socialists, Anarchists and independent trade unionists who did try to do this were subjected to beatings and a refusal to tolerate their open presence and propaganda. This was a sure sign that a reactionary leadership had already established hegemony over the movement and was willing to enforce it and that there was no serious opposition to this from the mass of participants. As soon as it became clear that the movement's reactionary social and political basis could not be overcome, it was right to call for a movement in direct opposition to it and the creation of a working class movement independent of both wings of the oligarchy.

The belief that Occupy or Tahrir style square occupations and mass protest marches, are per se progressive, whatever their objectives, or that they must represent an objective process that is progressive, has been contradicted historically many times. Most recently, the June 30, 2013 movement in Egypt that placed El-Sisi in power showed that, if their aims are confused and/or reactionary, mass movements will end in counterrevolutions.

The EU imperialist bloc led by Germany, with its allies in Klitschko's Udar party, was in favour of a 'compromise' which would have given the neoliberal Opposition the power but retained some degree of coalition between the Party of the Regions, Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) and Udar (Fist). This would have maintained the dual exploitation of Ukraine by Russian and EU imperialisms, but allowed a greater penetration of the Ukrainian economy by Franco-German finance capital.

US imperialism, which had been giving huge aid/subsidies to Ukraine and 'investing' 5 billion dollars in its

'democracy movements' for the better part of two decades, had other ideas. Through its various 'NGOs', the State Department used the mass movement in Ukraine to pursue its strategic aim of removing the country from Russian influence, intending sooner or later to place it under Nato protection and Western imperialist hegemony. Clearly, if the present Kyiv government wins out, this will be sooner.

Euromaidan was the final act of a policy whose first stage was the 2004 Orange Revolution, which was followed up by 'democracy building' NGOs advancing US 'soft power' in the country. The rivalry between the 'allied' EU and US imperialists was resolved in the US's favour by the refusal of the fascist component of Maidan to accept the compromise 'national unity' government presented in February. With the backing of the US, through its special envoy, Victoria Nuland, Fatherland and Svoboda created a coalition government that also included leaders of the Right Sector.

These events, and the first decrees of the Rada, inevitably alienated the Russian speaking population of Southern and Eastern Ukraine who could not identify with the open Russophobia and glorification of Stepan Bandera and the pro-Nazi OUN, of the western-based nationalists. The attacks on Lenin statues and Soviet war memorials underlined this. Especially in Crimea, which was never historically a part of Ukraine and had a substantial majority of Russian speakers, it was clear the authority of the new regime would not be accepted.

Thus the local authorities in the Crimea, with the aid of Russian Federation garrisons, immobilised the Ukrainian forces, declared for the secession of Crimea and organised a referendum. There can be no doubt that this move was approved by a majority of the population, however imperfect the conditions of the referendum. Russia's ready acceptance of the Crimean vote to leave Ukraine was however a response to the Kyiv coup, aimed at preserving its naval bases on the peninsula.

The character of the Maidan regime

The new regime in Kiev was composed of members of Fatherland, Svoboda, the Right Sector and several oligarchs and the representatives of oligarchs. These billionaires retain control over the media and the important agricultural and finance ministries, areas in which they have large personal investments. The fascists control the education and internal security ministries, as well as providing the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prosecutor General. The neoliberals, led by the banker Yatsenyuk, control the economic ministries and banks and relations with the IMF, the ECB etc. The oligarchs Igor Kolomoisky and Sergey Taruta were given Dnepropetrovsk and Donetsk to govern.

The repressive state apparatus disintegrated to a large extent during the uprising. The army has several times proved to be unuseable, that is, unreliable were it to be asked to fire on the people, whichever side gave the order. In the Crimea, around two thirds of Ukraine national army soldiers promptly opted to remain in Crimea, many joining the Russian army. Attempts to send normal army units to the East failed, with units defecting and refusing to fight.

On the other hand, the police forces in the West were heavily infiltrated or politically won over by the fascists quite early on, with some units from Lviv mutinying and joining the Right Sector attack on Parliament. As such, just as the old Yanukovich regime could rely only on the Berkut, so the new government has been forced to rely on the raising of a national guard and staffing this body and army units with fascist cadres.

Given the economic programme of Fatherland, and the control by the fascists of the internal repressive apparatus, the Kyiv government can be justly characterised as a neoliberal-fascist coalition government. This, of course, does not mean there are no contradictions within it, not only between the neoliberal-

nationalists and the fascists but also within these two wings. The zigzags in policy towards the east, with deceitful offers of federal concessions giving way to threats and then the reality of severe repression, indicate this.

There were, initially, also some moves against the more disorderly or headstrong fascist militias but this was no Night of the Long Knives, the reliance of the government on these elements for any serious repression means it will not want to dispense with their services for the foreseeable future.

The nature of the antifascist resistance

The Kiev government is increasingly unable to enforce its writ in the areas of Ukraine where a large minority of the population and a majority of the working class is concentrated. The regular (conscript) army clearly has no appetite for using force to suppress the opposition of people in the East, and the police forces in the East do not recognise the legitimacy of the Kyiv regime. Consequently, it will only be able to enforce its authority by using the fascist paramilitaries or the elite regiments of the army and police. Any such attempt would result in a massacre.

The working people of the cities and countryside of Eastern and Southern Ukraine have no obligation to subordinate themselves to the democratically illegitimate Kyiv government. One of the first actions of the Rada, already purged of over 100 deputies, mainly from the East, was to revoke the right of majority Russophone regions to use their own language in official business. Even though blocked by the President after US/EU protests, this alarmed a population which had never sympathised with West Ukrainian nationalism or voted for its parties. The widespread vandalising and destruction of Soviet statues and war memorials by fascist and nationalist forces who identify with the Nazi-ally Stepan Bandera could not fail to emphasise that this was not their government. To this must be added the ransacking and burning of offices of socialist and left parties in Kyiv and other cities, including the locals of the Communist Party of the Ukraine (which received 2.7 million votes in the last elections) and the far left grouping Union-Borotba. In May, the 32 deputies of the UCP were expelled from the Rada on the grounds that they were ?separatists.? The party has been threatened with illegality by Yatsenyuk

The replacement of governors in a number of Eastern cities with ones who would do the bidding of Yatsenyuk and Turchynov, and the calling of elections for 25 May, made the question of establishing authorities capable of defending the citizens of the East a tactical imperative. This was underlined by a series of attacks by Right Sector fascists against Ukrainian Communist Party offices and activists in Kyiv and similar actions against anti-coup demonstrations in Kharkov and other eastern cities.

Although local police did not attempt to enforce Kyiv's rule decisively, neither did they defend the local population against the fascists and, therefore, the formation of armed groups, largely drawn from ex-servicemen, and the occupation of administration buildings, police stations and arsenals, was fully justified and, indeed, essential. Given that this was exactly what the Maidan forces had done before their coup, without the slightest criticism from visiting US or EU officials, the uproar in response to analogous takeovers in eastern Ukraine is merely hypocritical propaganda. The constant accusations of ?separatism? and of being agents of a Putin plot to annex parts of Ukraine fall into the same category.

Because the ?People's Republics? of Donetsk and elsewhere were declared before there was any mass mobilisation, and there were no councils or assemblies that could hold their leaders to account, they could have remained little more than an adventure but, in the face of the attacks by the Right Sector and National Guard, they have gained popular support. Today, revolutionaries should certainly be for their defence against the attacks launched by the central government. Their capacity for resistance was proved during the first attack by Kyiv, when local civilians and a few lightly armed militiamen easily halted a column of

troops and armoured vehicles; the troops refusing to open fire and retreating, to the fury of Yatsenyuk.

However, the forces required for a protracted defence against what is clearly a better prepared second attempt, in all probability thanks to US-CIA assistance and a larger fascist participation, needs to draw in the working class in large numbers, forming a workers' militia that could confront the state forces and a general strike that could immobilise them. The widespread illusions in an intervention by Russian forces and Putin's protection have been dampened by Russia's agreement to the Geneva Accords, which called on the armed groups to disarm and to evacuate government buildings. Putin's offers to withdraw Russian troops from the border, his recognition of the 25 May election, and calls on the resistance not to hold the referendum, show that he ignores the wishes of the Donets and Luhansk resistance movements. Putin's appeals have been politely but firmly rejected by them.

The importance, and the possibility, of an intervention by socialists can be seen in Kharkov where the involvement of Borotba in the declaration of autonomy resulted in the promulgation of progressive demands for the end of wage-slavery and the abolition of private property. Donetsk has since called for the renationalisation of the oligarchs' industries and businesses and this has been echoed by Vyacheslav Ponomarev, the 'People's Mayor' of Slavyansk who has called for all the city's industry to be nationalised. Generally, the social forces making up the movement appear to be a coalition of local working class people including miners, some socialists and Communists but also assorted Russian nationalists and supporters of the 'Eastern' oligarchs. No doubt some are fascists and some are undercover Russian state forces but their involvement is nothing like that of the Right Sector in Maidan. The leaderships in Donetsk, Luhansk, Odessa etc, are neither fascists nor agents of Putin or Russian imperialism. Their only common programme is the demand for a referendum on autonomy and no recognition of Kyiv and its planned 25 May election.

Whatever the motives and composition of the militias which have been formed (for example, former army and Berkut police units, and even despite the inclusion of pan-Slav or pro-Russian chauvinists) their armed resistance is both justified and necessary. It was the absence of sufficiently armed and sizeable defence units in Odessa that enabled 1,000 fascists, with police collusion, to carry out a terrible pogrom and to terrorise the city for days and nights afterwards.

The antifascist militias have a radically different role from that played by Svoboda, and the Right Sector in the Maidan movement because they are not under the control of right wing nationalists, let alone fascists, and they do not exclude leftists. However, their leadership and, most importantly, the absence of broad working class mobilisations and organs of power, such as councils, that could hold them to account, are serious problems.

To remedy this situation, a mass movement with roots in the factories and the communities must be generated. This must now be the number one priority of the left who should advance social, economic and democratic goals that can attract and build unity between Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking workers and youth, including those who supported Maidan but are breaking from the neoliberal and fascist right wing in power.

Rival imperialisms battle over Ukraine

Ukraine remains a semi-colony, torn between exploitation by Russian and EU-US imperialisms. The current crisis was provoked by the Western powers' attempt to alter the existing balance of economic and political domination decisively in their favour, with the US, in particular, pursuing a strategy of military encirclement of Russia.

About 40 percent of Ukraine's trade is conducted with other post-Soviet countries, which buy more than 60 percent of Ukrainian exports. The proposed Association Agreement with the EU would, at least, seriously diminish and, at worst, sever these links, thereby devastating the industries and jobs in the East.

The role of Russia is determined by Putin's motivation to reinforce his bonapartist position as a strongman and defender of the Russian people internally and, externally, to protect Russia's imperialist domination over the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) against US/Nato attempts to take them over. Economically, Russian imperialism needs to defend its integration with the mining and engineering industries of the Eastern region of Ukraine, which include high tech armaments producers. Militarily, its motivation is to prevent the encroachment of Nato to its borders and secure its warm water port in the Black Sea. Thus, Russia's stance is defensive vis-à-vis the USA and the German-led EU but is nonetheless imperialist for that.

The threat posed by Russia to its eastern-European, Caucasian and central Asian semi-colonies is one of semi-colonial exploitation rather than 'Russification', which is categorically not a feature of modern Russian imperialism. The 'privileges' of Russian and Russian-speaking Ukrainians under pro-Russian and pro-Western leaders of post-Soviet Ukraine are a product of the economic structure of the country and their class position within it. The majority of Ukraine's heavy industry and military-industrial complexes are in the 'Russophone' regions of the South and East. This brings with it relatively better wages and living conditions than the under-developed and stagnating small-scale and agriculture-oriented industry in the West.

We oppose any overt or covert military invasion of any part of Ukraine by Russia, because its objective would be the semicolonial subordination of the country and its working class to the interests of Russian imperialism. Although it is likely that Russian troops would be welcomed by many Eastern Ukrainians, even there a significant minority would bitterly oppose them, and this opposition would not fall clearly along 'ethnic' delineations. There are many Ukrainians who identify as both Russian and Ukrainian, or just as Russian but who identify with, and wish to live in, a politically independent Ukraine. This minority would find themselves nationally oppressed and a guerrilla resistance would be nearly inevitable. The unity of the Ukrainian working class and its international links to the Russian proletariat would be massively set back.

The economic motivation of EU and US imperialism is to gain access to a large pool of some of the cheapest labour in Europe, to gain access for Western agro-industry to the severely inefficient and undeveloped agricultural land, to monopolise and modernise the extractive industries in the Don basin and to increase Russian dependence on Western (particularly German) industry by dismantling the inefficient and unproductive heavy industries in the East. The military motivation for the US is to put Nato troops on the border with Russia and to threaten, if not expel, its naval base at Sevastopol. This southern encirclement of Russia will be completed through the projected accession of Georgia to Nato.

The aggressive policy of US imperialism is a source of tension between it and its Nato allies in Europe. German industry is closely tied to Russia and Europe itself imports around 40 per cent of its oil and gas from Russia. Thus, while the EU is prepared to engage in a certain amount of manoeuvring for influence in Ukraine, it remains opposed to economic sanctions on Russia and to the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to Nato, which it sees as an unnecessarily threatening act against Russia. Similarly, while German imperialism is reluctant to escalate military pressure, Britain has enthusiastically reinforced its contribution to Nato forces in the Baltic States and Poland.

The Western imperialists' use of democracy and human rights is often assisted by the authoritarian and repressive character of the regimes in the former soviet states. These are not just remnants of their Stalinist and autocratic pasts but dictated by their vulnerability to their older and more powerful rivals who

control far greater economic and natural resources, access to markets, and a global network of military bases and sophisticated weaponry. Nor do they have control over the global media, old and new, that the US and the Europeans possess.

Ironically, the deployment of 'soft power' ('make them love, not just fear, us?') comes at a time when the level of spying, phone and computer hacking, and dirty tricks of all sorts, particularly by the USA, has come to light (Wikileaks/Snowden etc). It comes, too, at a time of growing mass recognition of the hollowing out of democracy (Occupy#). However, just as in the first cold war, sections of the liberal intelligentsia have fallen victim to their own imperialists' propaganda and decided that, 'the main enemy is abroad?' in particular in Russia.

Ukraine is clearly a major campaign by the security services, the media and the politicians to co-opt 'useful idiots?' into a crusade against Russia. It is easier for the US to attack Russia because it is less economically significant than China. Disrupting economic links with Beijing would be more difficult (for the time being, at least) because of the semi-dependence of the US national debt on Chinese bond purchase and its trans-Pacific trade. However, US aggression against Russia, as well as provoking retaliation, will provoke the tightening of an alliance between Beijing and Moscow.

On the centenary of the First Imperialist World War, we are seeing the crystallisation of alliances that can, if not in the short term, lead not just to a New Cold War but, beyond that, to a Third Imperialist War. Ukraine has to be seen within this framework because its right wing nationalists and fascists would never have got so far, or been able to act with such complete impunity, without the sponsorship of the USA and the acquiescence, however sceptical, of its German and other European allies.

German ruling class hesitation is not due to a more delicate democratic conscience but to recognition that the US is wrecking its Eastern policy of penetrating Eurasia, using Russia as an ally (client or agent). If America succeeds, it will put a belt of pro-American states (and Nato members) between Germany and Russia. Germany, however, continues to attempt to reinstate its original plan of a compromise between the Eastern and Western oligarchs and their politicians and behind that a reconciliation between the EU and Russia. Doubtless the US will continue to do all it can to sabotage such efforts.

Revolutionaries in the 'West?' should not cover up the imperialist nature, and crimes, of Russia and China, nor fail to support struggles for democratic and national rights within their borders (for example, in Chechnya and Tibet) but their first task must be to mobilise against 'their own?' imperialists' new war drive, exposing its media lies, alerting the masses to the war preparations of their rulers and ruthlessly exposing the New Cold War liberals and leftists for the fools or, in some cases, the rogues, that they are.

Solving the National Question.

Under Stalin and his successors, the Ukrainian people suffered various degrees of national oppression from bloody and murderous purges and famines to the simple denial of the country's right to decide for or against independence. Since the 1930s, Trotskyists have defended the struggle for an independent socialist Ukraine as part of a Socialist United States of Europe including, of course, Russia.

Since 1991, however, various governments in Kyiv have, in their turn, discriminated against Russian and other minorities and tried to Ukrainise them in terms of language and culture. This has inevitably produced alienation between East and West. The present regime is far worse in this respect than its predecessors and thus threatens the unity and integrity of the country and, above all, of its working class. Therefore, it is vital that socialists explain the principles, inherited from Lenin, for the overcoming of all national antagonisms on a thoroughly democratic basis which can open the road to class unity and the struggle for

socialism.

The Kyiv government does not recognise the right of any part of Ukraine to self-determination if this were to include the right to secede. Just as in Spain, Turkey, etc, this is an act of national oppression in and of itself and cannot be defended on the grounds of Ukraine's historic oppression by Russia. No 'right to the entire undivided territory of a country' can exist over and above the right of its inhabitants to determine for themselves in which state they wish to live.

Thus, Crimea was not historically part of Ukraine; it never had a Ukrainian speaking majority and its population never voted to join it. The cruel injustices committed by Stalin against the Tatar population cannot invalidate the right to self-determination of the majority of the peninsula's population who are not a recent settler population such as the Israelis are in Palestine or the Han Chinese are in Tibet. In Crimea, socialists should have supported the right of the entire people to a referendum and supported its outcome.

This does not mean that socialists should have advocated secession or unity with Russia. On the contrary, we would have advocated voting 'No' to a federation with Russia because this would undermine yet further the potential for the unity of the Ukrainian working class, reinforcing the conflicting nationalisms in both the East and West and providing fertile soil for Ukrainian and Russian fascist and chauvinist reaction.

It would have been far better to support the option of a return to Crimea's May 1992 Constitution with its status as an autonomous republic, a status overturned unilaterally by the Ukrainian Rada. Secession breaks the unity of the workers of Crimea with those of the rest of Ukraine and takes them out of the struggle for democracy and socialism there. If this approach holds good for Crimea, then even more is it true for Eastern Ukraine with its more mixed national/linguistic identity. For all that, we must continue to support the democratic right of the people to hold a referendum with the options either of seeking autonomy within Ukraine (in a federal republic) or secession (federalisation with Russia).

Nevertheless, we are in favour of a struggle to maintain the unity of Ukraine, whether that is on a bourgeois democratic basis or, as we hope and struggle for, on the basis of the successful establishment of working class power and the building of socialism. This perspective can only be carried out on the following basis:

- a) recognising the democratic right of minorities to self-determination, autonomy and self-government
- b) opposition to all privileges for majorities and the guarantee of legal and political equality for all minorities in every region.
- c) the independent role of the working class fighting for the democratic rights of all as well as against exploitation by oligarchs and imperialists east and west

The new Crimean authorities have threatened the Crimean Tatar Mejlis (parliament) with dissolution and talked of evicting Tatar 'settlers' from unauthorised areas. Any such acts of discrimination or oppression should be strongly opposed by all democrats, let alone socialists.

The Eastern and Southern Ukraine are radically different issues though here, too, the Russophone population has good cause to fear, and every right to resist, the imposition of Kyiv's authority over them. This requires tactical independence or autonomy but not strategic or permanent secession and the break up of Ukraine.

Of course, Russia might seem a relief from the threat of Odessa being repeated in Slavyansk, Mariupol, Donetsk and Luhansk, but it would, in all probability, be only a temporary one. The dangers of a real Balkans-style civil war; ethnic cleansing (of Russian speakers in the West and Ukrainian speakers in the East) etc would be a likely consequence of a Russian occupation. In any case, to rely on Putin is to rest on a broken reed. Therefore, the position advanced by Borotba of opposition to Russian annexation of eastern

Ukraine and the raising of anti-oligarch and socialist demands is the correct path to take.

From antifascist resistance to a workers' government

The self-defence of the cities in Southern and Eastern Ukraine against the attack by the Kyiv forces and fascists is the immediate and overriding objective of the struggle. If these towns and cities were taken by such forces, even more horrific pogroms would result. Therefore, the victory of the resistance forces over the fascists and the state forces is a precondition of all further advance.

To strengthen this defence requires the broadest mobilisation of the masses, including the industrial and mining working class, via a general strike. Captured weapons from the arsenals need to be distributed and a mass working class and people's militia created. Forces from the police and the regular army must be won over to halt and throw back the advance of the counterrevolution. This in turn will unleash the forces of a workers' revolution.

Assemblies of some sort are reported to exist in Donetsk and other cities but what is needed is the creation of councils or committees of workers' and peasants' delegates. In the factories, likewise, workers' committees are necessary to take control of workplaces and trade unions from the oligarchs and their managers.

At first regional, and then national, coordination of working class resistance can be the basis for a workers' government. Such a government, based on an armed militia, will be able to drive back and defeat the forces of fascism and the neoliberal-EU-IMF austerity programme. It will be able to appeal to the workers of the centre and West of the country to break with the Maidan government and support the goal of a united workers' Ukraine, in which all nationalities will have equal rights and be free of any sort of national oppression.

A workers' government, starting in the East and South, will be able to advance a programme to re-organise the political and economic system of the country as a whole. The 'Donetsk Republic' has called for the renationalisation of the oligarchs' enterprises. This would be a giant step forward but it could only be done if workers themselves take over all the former state property stolen by the oligarchs, with no compensation to them, and by establishing workers' control of production.

This, in turn, would immediately pose the need for the coordination of production by means of a democratically agreed plan. A system of adequate social welfare, improved wages and working conditions and democratic freedoms would then be possible. There must be no return to a bureaucratic dictatorship or rule by a party nomenklatura; no return to Stalinist command planning.

Against the Kyiv presidential elections on 25 May, socialists should demand the convening of a democratic all-Ukrainian Constituent Assembly, elected under the supervision of the workers. The oligarchs' control of the media must be broken, without this, no serious democratic discussion of the future of the country can take place.

The Constituent Assembly must discuss the social basis of democracy in the whole of the country and socialists must fight for the rule of workers' councils like the soviets of 1917. Until then, we should call for autonomy for all city and other units of local self-government, with democratic control over policing and a local militia.

The fight for a Constituent Assembly and for workers' control over land and industry must be defended against capitalist violence by a multi-ethnic workers' militia accountable to the democratic organisations of the working class, initially in the individual workplaces and towns, but eventually linking up regionally and

nationally.

By rejecting all the neoliberal austerity measures of the EU and showing the way to socialism under direct working class power, workers in the West and in surrounding countries will be encouraged to come to the aid of Ukrainian workers and to spread socialist revolutions internationally.

In Ukraine, it is not only the social and working class tasks that need a socialist revolution; the democratic tasks, most importantly, the national question, cannot be solved on the basis of a crisis ridden, oligarchic, semi-colonial capitalist system. Under capitalism, the struggle for profit between imperialist and Ukrainian capitalists will inevitably inflame national tensions as a result of the struggle for scarce resources.

Only the expropriation of large-scale capital and a planned economy will allow for development of all the regions according to need. This perspective, Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution, is no utopia. It is the only solution to the terrible danger facing Ukraine today.

Internationalism

On its own, or in isolation, the Ukrainian working class will be unable complete its class struggle against its own oligarchs or resist imperialist subjugation by the USA, EU or Russia. It needs, and deserves, major international support from workers internationally. It is especially the obligation of those in the imperialist states (Russia, the USA, the EU) to launch an all-out struggle against their ruling classes either to subordinate the whole of Ukraine, via the EU and Nato, or bring about its partition into spheres of interest along ethno-linguistic lines. In addition, it is vital to expose Obama, Merkel and Co's posing as the defenders of democracy or human rights or Putin's posing as the defender of the Russian people in Ukraine.

Socialists and anti-war activists in the imperialist countries can best offer solidarity by building an international anti-war movement against the war-drive of all the imperialist powers and in solidarity with the antifascist resistance.

The initial basis for this should be:

? No to all US-EU boycotts against Russia ? all Nato warships out of the Black Sea and the Baltic.

? All Western armed forces and bases out of Eastern Europe ? no Nato manoeuvres in Ukraine.

? Down with any imperialist intervention, Western or Russian, no foreign troops in Ukraine. All CIA and RSB security personnel out of Ukraine

? No to new wars, cold or hot ? dissolve Nato.

? Halt all Western government support to the Junta in Kyiv, Stop the implementation of the EU austerity programme. Cancel Ukraine's debts to the international bankers and financial institutions.

? Solidarity with the antifascist resistance and defence of the left (CPU and Borotba) suffering under repression