

# Kyrgyzstan revolution overthrows the government!

Simon Hardy Thu, 08/04/2010 - 17:41

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The events in the central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan are an encouragement to the working class of the world argues Simon Hardy

A revolution on the streets of Kyrgyzstan has toppled the unpopular regime of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Bakiyev has fled the capital Bishkek after protesters, some of whom were armed, took control of police stations and government buildings.

The protests against the government started in Talas, a city in the West of Kyrgyzstan on Tuesday 6 April. People were angry about the cost of fuel and gas (which has quadrupled in the last few days) as well as the chronic economic problems of the country. Kyrgyzstan is a desperately poor country, with over one third of the population living below the poverty line.

A protest in Bishkek was brutally attacked by the police who fired into the crowd, killing and wounding many people. Enraged demonstrators fought back, forcing the police off the streets in violent clashes. The events in Bishkek were not isolated, across the country local and central government buildings were seized by protesters as the old regime crumbled before the mass anger of the workers and poor.

Rosa Otunbayeva has been declared the head of a provisional 'peoples government'. Otunbayeva is a leading member of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, which was in opposition to the ruling government. She declared that it was necessary to take power to restore 'security' as the main order of the day. This shows the fear of the country's capitalist class that the protests go too far and are in danger of overthrowing not only a government but the entire social order.

This fear was plainly shared by the world's media who to express alarm at it being a 'violent revolution' and that it might 'spread to neighbouring countries.' This is not because of a principled aversion to bloodshed but rather apprehension that only a 'peaceful revolution' like the 'colour and flower revolutions' which swept the states of the former Soviet block earlier in the decade could be relied upon to leave the capitalist state 'the army and police' undisturbed, a safe guardian for the property of the ruling class.

The Social Democratic Party will now work overtime to demobilise the protests, disarm them and allow the police to come back onto the streets. The state was temporarily defeated in the revolutionary struggle, unable to 'restore order', the army paralysed, unwilling to come out and fire on their fellow people. The danger now is that the revolutionary potential is lost in the coming days and the masses cheated of the fruits of their victory.

**The legacy of the Tulip revolution**

Bakiyev is no stranger to 'revolution.' He was brought to power by the so-called Tulip revolution in 2005, which overthrew the unpopular president Askar Akayev, a pro-privatisation, neoliberal determined to cling onto power. The election results were undermined by allegations of widespread vote rigging and nepotism and led to demonstrations sweeping the country.

The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan has played a very prominent role in the recent power struggles. It was key player in the 2005 Tulip revolution that overthrew the last government, with several members playing key roles in the interim government it installed.

Many put down the revolutionary events to the lack of democracy, as if a western-style constitution would solve all the problems. But the reason why the Kyrgyz people rise up with such intense revolutionary energy is not simply the democratic deficit but the chronic poverty and misery of life in their country.

### **The social crisis in Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan is a poor country, but it potentially has untapped resources of gas and oil under its soil. However the low level of the country's industrial development - like the rest of Central Asia it suffered a catastrophic economic decline after the restoration of capitalism and the break up of the Soviet in the 1990s. It means that the country is unable to locate or extract these resources without foreign investment. Whilst Russia is more than happy to provide the money and machinery to do this job, it would also demand the lion's share of the profits that would result from these precious commodities. Such is the tragic fate of most of the former countries of the USSR under a capitalist world order.

Indeed Russia is to blame for turning the already difficult situation into an impossible one for Bakiyev. In early April they cut the special subsidy on refined petroleum products from Russia to Kyrgystan, resulting in a steep hike in gas and oil prices. This comes after serious hikes in 2007 (around 44 per cent) and a huge increase in the cost of Uzbekistan gas in 2008 (rising almost overnight from 55 to 145 dollars per thousand cubic metres). The high cost of gas means that people are forced to cook less and cannot turn their heaters on in the severe winter weather. Major power cuts in the capital and other towns blight the lives of ordinary residents.

This is compounded by the general inflationary situation (as much as 30 per cent in the last three years), high unemployment and the impact of the global economic crisis on the economy, which saw a dip in 2009 as fiscal spending became constricted and less money came into the country.

Then there is the political complication that have embroiled Kyrgyzstan in the new "Great Game" in the region - likened to the 19th Century rivalry between the British and Russian empires over strategic routes into India. This time its is a scramble for access to energy, pipelines and other natural resources, trade routes, and United States and Nato supply routes for the occupation forces in Afghanistan. China too has shown an increasing interest.

The Manas air base is a key staging post for the US military - especially after the closure of the K2 base in Uzbekistan when George Bush fell out with Uzbek dictator Islam Karimov in 2005. Also tensions between Moscow and Washington played a role - as Vladimir Putin realised that the US was establishing long-term bases in what it regarded as Russia's 'backyard.' Bakiyev tried to play Moscow off against Washington to get significant increases in the rental for Manas. In early 2009, after a Russian promise of a huge aid package, he threatened that the base would close but under Barrack Obama the US was able to get an extension.

And it is this combined social and political crisis which neither Otunbayeva or any other capitalist politician

can solve. As long as Kyrgyzstan is trapped in the nightmare of capitalism, hungrily eyed by the imperialist wolves powers like the USA and Russia, it will be unable to lift its people out of poverty.

Whilst the Kyrgyz people do not lack enthusiasm for a revolutionary struggle, what they do lack is a party, a socialist working class party that can lead the working class to power. Without such an organisation popular uprisings are usually hijacked by capitalist forces who manipulate the anger of the people to bring about a regime change, in reality replacing one wing of the corrupt capitalist class with another wing.

A revolutionary party would also seize control of the banks, arrest the key members of the state apparatus, the police chiefs, the generals in the army, and councils of action based on delegates of the workers and farmers, which would co-ordinate the revolutionary seizure of power. Such bodies would form the basis for a truly workers government which could begin to plan the economy and expropriate the capitalists.

Such a solution is the only really revolutionary way out, no colour or tulip revolutions can really smash the capitalist state and take power into the hands of the workers and poor. A socialist revolution is needed to solve the crisis and this must be the aim of the working class, youth and poor masses in the coming months.

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