

# Ukraine: New battles

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There never was a real ceasefire. Again and again, the Kievan army, or their fascist allies attacked with artillery, missiles and aircraft, mainly against the civilian population. Obviously Poroshenko is hoping to demoralise these people, already hit by winter and hunger, by bombing hospitals and technical infrastructure.

The German mainstream media managed to attribute even those attacks to the "separatists" or claimed that there was some "uncertainty about the aggressors". However, the most elementary logic of any military conflict, that you do not bombard your own side, especially not when there is an official ceasefire and the front lines are very clear, speaks against this stupid propaganda. Even the rocket attack on a bus in Donetsk, a city dominated by the "separatists", was blamed on them.

## Attack and counter-attack

At the beginning of the year, Poroshenko went onto the offensive with an open attack on the airport at Donetsk and the announcement of recruiting 50,000 conscripts. As this article goes to press, the attack on the airport has failed and in some places the battalions of the "people's republics" have advanced. Their military and civilian leaderships have terminated the farce of the Minsk Agreement. The Western imperialists and their watchdogs again accuse Putin of being behind this. But is that the case?

Putin's position is currently difficult to assess. In recent months, Russia's influence has been directed at securing greater control over the structures in the East. It is mainly people from the old regime of Yanukovich people, who still hold their posts, who follow the directives from the Kremlin. Even the November elections have changed little. (See also NI 149 Interview with a comrade of Borotba). To maintain this, the Communist Party was prevented from standing in the elections in Donetsk as well as several popular commanders.

## Putin and the "People's Republics"

What can only displease the Bonaparte in the Kremlin are the growing Left tendencies in the East. Once the economy had collapsed, in large part because the Kievan troops had bombarded many factories and mines, there were no goods to export and the state and oligarchs ceased wage payments, even those workers who initially did not think it necessary to move, or were held back by the flood of Russian or Pan-Slav propaganda, have been forced to. Many have fled to Western Ukraine, even more to Russia. Those that remain, fight. Units, such as the "Red Cossacks", have been formed by the workers, especially the miners. They, like others, fight under red flags or the Soviet star.

Politically, there is also the question of what to do with the factories and mines that have been abandoned or bombed by the Kiev government or the oligarchs. The Right wing, that is the Yanukovich people, Russian nationalists and Putin's agents, want to bring them under the control of Russian oligarchs. The

workers seem to have other plans. Even the "Independent movement of Novorossiia" a petty-bourgeois populist association, expressed this in its programmatic statement, "Large scale property, industrial and financial assets are owned by the state. The National Council shall be composed of delegates from councils and national and labour collectives and shall be the highest legislative body in Novorossiia." An obvious concession to the workers.

Two things displease Putin; one is the strengthening Left development but the second is the illusion of Russian nationalists that he, Putin, will annex the Donbass as he did the Crimea. Since Putin does not intend to live up to these expectations, the Right wing of the resistance tends towards arbitrary actions, which the Western imperialists are more than happy to use to put pressure on Putin. Since he was able to use the August offensive by the rebels to force Poroshenko to the Minsk negotiating table, we can assume that it is quite possible that the rebel troops attacked Mariupol to prevent him from sacrificing the people's republics at the international negotiating table.

### Conflicts in the East

The conflicts within the "people's republics" have increased in sharpness. A constant source of conflict is the distribution of relief goods: who is to control this; pro-Russian Yanukowych people or the fighting forces? This question is often posed by the more progressive elements. Some of these call for committee of the population. In recent weeks, several commanders of the "Red Cossacks" attacked Plotnitski, the head of state of the People's Republic of Lugansk, because he was doing too little for the population and filching too much for himself. He, in turn, accused Alexander Bednov, the popular defender of the city in the August battles, of embezzlement and torture of civilians. This happened after Bednov and some of his men were liquidated in unexplained circumstances by (presumably) Russian Special Forces.

The arrest and detention of four members of Borotba is equally a testament to the deepening conflict in the East. However, their release after 10 days also shows the weight of the left forces.

These conflicts show how wrong were all those who belittled the political movement in the East, or explained it away by insisting the anti-fascist fighters were Russian invaders who were opposed to the local population.

History remains the history of class struggles, even if they are obscured by the form of civil war. Or, as Trotsky once made clear, "The sectarian simply ignores the fact that the national struggle, as one of the most confused and most chaotic but ,at the same time, extremely important forms of class struggle, cannot be decided solely by reference to the future world revolution."

Now, as the fronts between Left and Right, between working class, Russian nationalists and the interests of Russian imperialism are becoming clearer in the East, it is high time for all Leftists, who previously took a neutral position, to rethink their passivity.

### Return of the class struggle?

Even in western Ukraine there are growing conflicts. At the end of last year, there were strikes by tram workers in Kiev and refinery workers in Odessa. In one case it was over unpaid wages, in the other, the multi-billionaire Kolomoisky wanted to buy up the refinery on the cheap.

In the steel factory of Kremenchug, which also belongs to Kolomoisky, thousands of workers protested against the sacking of 2,500 workers. In January, there was a mass strike for the payment of back wages in the machine works at Yuzhmash in Dnepropetrovsk.

These are good opportunities for communists not only to support the working class in Western Ukraine but also to warn them that a victory of the ultra-nationalist Kiev oligarch government in the civil war would have disastrous consequences for them as well as for the workers in the East.

The process of reorganising the class must also be taken forward in the East. The spontaneous movement of the class is politically as undeveloped as in the West. Political clarification and revolutionary propaganda are just as necessary there. Without this, however, the political consciousness of the class, which is currently expressed in a vague "leftist" identification with the Soviet Union or the anti-fascist struggle, will not be able to meet the demands of the struggle..

It is one thing to occupy abandoned factories in the Civil War, but it is something else to then defend them politically. This means turning the workers' councils and militias against the bourgeois parliaments and governments, whether in the Donbass or throughout Ukraine and to march towards revolution.

### Borotba and the revolutionary programme

While it is correct to form a military united front with the Russian nationalists against the Kiev regime, which is responsible not only for devastating social attacks, but also the national oppression of the East, it would be wrong to limit oneself to that. Building links with the class in the west of the country is only possible if the social issues are addressed and for that independent class organisations are needed, not just Soviet flags.

At the moment, the only organisation in the whole of Ukraine that would be able to develop a revolutionary programme for the entire class against the oligarchs and the nationalists, is Borotba. Anyone who is on the wrong side in the Civil War, and even supports the military operations of the Kiev regime, such as the "Left Opposition", will also ultimately only serve the counter-revolution elsewhere in the class struggle.

However, so far, Borotba has not presented such a programme. While it has correctly formed the necessary military alliance with the nationalists in the East, it has declined to make all the necessary political criticism - a mistake made by many centrists. This is comparable to several groups in Germany who rightly support the fighters in Kobane but fail to criticise the policies of the PKK's successor organisations who have replaced their former Stalinist nationalism with a crude mixture of social democracy, libertarian postmodernism and bourgeois feminism.

Just as this does not make such centrist groups libertarians themselves, so also Borotba is not "Russian nationalist", as some claim. However, at a time when the working class in Ukraine is reorganising itself and asserting itself more clearly as it shakes off the passivity of the past 20 years, a clear programmatic orientation is needed to build on these advances and to prevent them being wiped out under the immediate threat of war and fascism.

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