

CRISIS IN UKRAINE

A **NewPolitics** PAMPHLET

Ukraine Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Is There a Way Out?

BY JOANNE LANDY

Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Interimperialist Rivalry

BY KEVIN B. ANDERSON

Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine

BY SEAN LARSON

Three articles from the forthcoming issue of *New Politics* magazine
(Summer 2014, Issue #57, vol. XV, no. 1)

new POLITICS

a journal of socialist thought

Founding Editors

Julius Jacobson (1922-2003) Phyllis Jacobson (1922-2010)

Editorial Board

Riad Azar	Amy Littlefield
Sam Bottone	Betty Reid Mandell
Gertrude Ezorsky	Marvin Mandell
Barry Finger, business mgr.	Scott McLemee
Thomas Harrison	Jason Schulman
Michael Hirsch	Stephen R. Shalom, co-editor
Nancy Holmstrom	Bhaskar Sunkara
Dan La Botz, co-editor	Adaner Usmani
Micah Landau	Lois Weiner
Joanne Landy	Reginald Wilson
	Julia Wrigley, co-editor

Sponsors

Stanley Aronowitz	William Kornblum
Derrick Bell (1930-2011)	Jesse Lemisch
Elaine Bernard	Nelson Lichtenstein
Jon Bloom	Ravi Malhotra
Stephen Eric Bronner	David McReynolds
Mari Jo Buhle	Deborah Meier
Paul Buhle	Gwendolyn Mink
Lynn Chancer	Kim Moody
Noam Chomsky	Kai Nielsen
Lorraine Cohen	Martin Oppenheimer
Bogdan Denitch	Frances Fox Piven
Michael Eric Dyson	Nancy Romer
Barbara Ehrenreich	Ronnie Steinberg
Barbara Epstein	Stephen Steinberg
Samuel Farber	Amos Vogel (1921-2012)
David Finkel	Peter Waterman
Barbara Garson	Stuart Weir
Allen Graubard (1938-2012)	Cornel West
Richard Greeman	Howard Zinn (1922-2010)
Justin Grossman	

NEW POLITICS is published by New Politics Associates, 155 West 72 Street, Room 402, New York, NY 10023 USA

e-mail: newpoliticsjournal@gmail.com

newpol.org

NEW POLITICS is indexed in The Left Index and in Alternative Press Index, as well as Political Science Abstracts, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, and International Political Science Abstracts. *New Politics* is distributed in bookstores and newsstands by Ingram Periodicals and by Ubiquity Distributors. Cover design and illustrations by Lisa Lyons.

Subscriptions: \$24 for four issues. Institution rate: \$50. Foreign subscriptions (including Canada): \$40. Foreign institution rate: \$66. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency drawn on U.S. banks. Single copy: \$9 (includes postage and handling). Bulk rate postage paid at Peoria, IL. Or subscribe on line at newpol.org.

©2014 New Politics Associates ISSN (0028-6494)

VOLUME XV • NUMBER 1 • Summer 2014

THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

THE CRISIS IN THE UKRAINE HAS RAISED GRAVE PROBLEMS for the people of that country, significant dangers for world peace, and many contending views on the left. Here we offer three articles that we think help us make sense of what's going on, by Joanne Landy, Kevin B. Anderson, and Sean Larson. Landy and Anderson attempt to provide a political assessment of what has been going on, while Larson offers some important background on the Ukrainian elite. Obviously, the situation on the ground is changing daily, but basic political principles and background information won't be easily outdated.

—THE EDITORS

Ukraine Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Is There a Way Out?

JOANNE LANDY

THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE United States and Russia are attempting to shape events in Ukraine in their own interests, not for the benefit of the Ukrainian people. Ukrainians have long suffered from domination by Moscow, under the Russian czars and later in the Soviet Union, most horrifically under Stalin. With the end of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, millions hoped for freedom and a new beginning. However, the United States and Western Europe exploited the collapse of the Soviet system to expand their own military and economic power, extending NATO into

a dozen formerly Communist nations (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Albania, and Croatia), and, they hoped, into Ukraine and Georgia as well. Equally destructive, the West attempted to use its economic heft, “shock therapy,” and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to push a brutal capitalism on the people of the former Communist countries.

In late 2013 mass protests erupted in Ukraine against the government of Viktor Yanukovich, culminating in huge demonstrations of hundreds of thousands. Despite having been elected, Yanukovich was a repressive and grotesquely corrupt ruler who lavished upon himself obscene privileges, including a vast personal compound furnished with a spa, a zoo, a large

JOANNE LANDY is Co-Director of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy and a New Politics editorial board member. The author wishes to thank Thomas Harrison, Stephen Shalom, and Jesse Lemisch for their assistance in writing this article. The views expressed are her own.

boat, a massive car collection, and a golden toilet (!), while defending the interests of the wealthy oligarchs who supported his government.

In January 2014, Yanukovich signed a series of anti-democratic laws similar to those already imposed on Russians under Vladimir Putin, which sharply limited freedom of speech and assembly. As mass protests mounted, the government sent riot police on February 18 to brutally repress the people in the streets. Two days later, riot police again fought against protesters, and the battle culminated in snipers who had taken positions on rooftops shooting at demonstrators. Some Maidan detractors have argued that the snipers were actually deployed by the opposition to create an incident that would discredit the government. The evidence for this theory is dubious; in any event, the corruption, repressiveness, and undemocratic record of the Yanukovich government are indisputable, and gave more than adequate cause for the uprising.

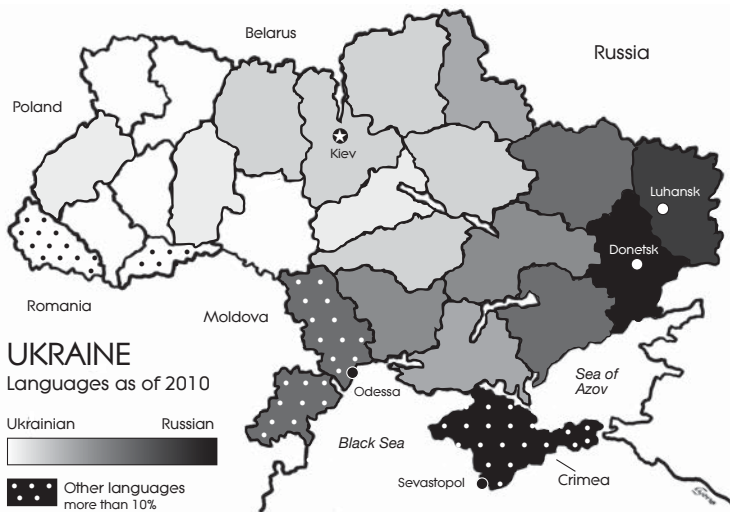
The Maidan was an expression of mass discontent that had been building for years, and cannot be explained away as simply the result of a false flag operation or a plot by Washington—though we know that the United States and other Western countries have worked to

take advantage of popular dissatisfaction for their own purposes and will do everything they can to see that the radical democratic potential of the Maidan doesn't come to fruition. They will be helped in their efforts by the fact that the Ukrainian left and labor movements are very weak, leaving a vacuum to be filled by leaders who embrace the neoliberal austerity measures promoted by the United States and the European Union. These measures will cause bitter suffering for the masses of Maidan protesters, many of whom have been under the illusion that joining the European Union will bring them prosperity and a decent standard of living (an illusion held as well by millions in Greece and other southern European countries until bitter experience has begun to show them otherwise). In addition, though the far right forces of Svoboda and the Right Sector were only a small portion of the protesters, they played a key role in the physical defense of the Maidan against violent government attack. Today there are a number of far right figures in the temporary coalition government that was hastily constituted by parliament after Yanukovich left Kiev; it remains to be seen whether the Ukrainian people will permit these dangerous elements to

remain in leading government positions.

After Yanukovich

Once in power, the new post-Yanukovich government took steps that were certain to make the country vulnerable to Russian attempts to undermine Ukraine's independence. First, parliament passed a law revoking the status of Russian—the native tongue of 30 to 40 percent of Ukrainians—as an official language in areas where Russian speakers consti-



tuted 10 percent or more of the population. This reactionary law was quickly canceled by the new acting Ukrainian president, Aleksandr Turchinov, who must have come to realize that it would set off an explosive reaction. But the damage had been done, fostering suspicion and hostility toward the new government among many Russian speakers, particularly in the eastern and southern regions of the country. Compounding this disastrous signal about language rights, the new government declared from the outset that it would adopt the crippling economic measures demanded by the European Union and Western financial institutions. Conscious of how hugely unpopular the social cuts and privatizations the West was demanding would be, when the new prime minister, Arseny Yatseniuk (famously known familiarly as “Yats” to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland), announced his determination to carry out harsh austerity measures, he conceded, eerily, that doing so would mean that Ukraine would be led by a “suicide” government.

The Rights of Less Powerful Countries

NATO was an imperial military alliance from its inception, and with the end of the Soviet empire it lost even its retrograde Cold War rationale for existence. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy, of which I am Co-Director, and anti-war movements around the world called for NATO to dissolve after 1989 (better late than never). Instead, NATO aggressively extended its reach into the former Soviet orbit. This fact, however, does not justify Russia’s interference in the domestic affairs of Ukraine: supporting a lightning referendum in Crimea under the shadow of Russian troops and operatives or declaring, as Putin has, that eastern and southern Ukraine are “Novorossiia” (or “New Russia”), signaling that Moscow would be justified in intervening, by force if necessary, to defend Russian speakers in that region. Powerful countries have no right to turn neighboring nations into “buffer states”

by invoking security as a justification. When real or concocted security threats are used to justify imperialism by the United States, Russia,

Ukrainians face complex and pressing problems in establishing just and democratic structures in their country, but they need to work through those problems without imperial interference from either the West or Russia.

or any other strong military power, prospects for peace and democracy suffer a terrible blow. Ukrainians face complex and pressing problems in establishing just and democratic structures in their country, but they need to work through those problems without imperial interference from either the West or Russia. The negotiating partners should be eastern and western Ukrainians, not the United States, the European Union, or Moscow.

The Russian annexation of Crimea is to be condemned because of the intimidating way in which it was achieved (and the precedent that was thus set for future intimidation), and because of the fact that short shrift was given to considering the rights of Tatars and Ukrainian speakers, who together make up a third of Crimea’s population. But there is good reason to believe that the majority of Crimeans would have freely voted to rejoin Russia in a fair referendum, and it seems doubtful that Crimea will ever return to Ukraine.

However, according to recent opinion polls conducted by the U.S.-headquartered Pew Research Center and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the situation in eastern and southern Ukraine seems quite different:

the great majority of the population in these regions say that they are suspicious of the Kiev government and want a measure of autonomy to protect their regional interests, but wish to remain part of Ukraine. Arguably people in the east and south should have the right to secede and become independent or integrated into Russia if they so desire, but their views should be expressed in legitimate votes that will either confirm or disconfirm the opinion polls, not in hasty “referendums” conducted under pressure from unaccountable armed groups and Russian military intimidation. (To those who say that Russia hasn’t intervened militarily in Ukraine, my reply is twofold: 1) there are more than likely secret Russian operatives playing a role in eastern Ukraine and, in any case 2) even if the Russian troops massed on the border with

Ukrainians need parties that can build an independent Ukraine unaligned with either NATO or Russia, outside of the German-dominated European Union and the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union.

Ukraine haven’t fired a shot, they are being used as a weapon to intimidate the population. Daniel Ellsberg uses a metaphor to make this point in another context: he has often said that when the U.S. threatens to use nuclear weapons, it is in fact using them, just as someone who points a gun at someone’s head in the midst of a confrontation is using that gun whether or not he actually fires it.)

A peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian crisis will doubtless need to involve some kind of significantly decentralized structure for the

country, though the extent of regional autonomy remains to be negotiated in hard bargaining by the representatives of both sides. However, a huge obstacle to democratic bargaining is the presence of ultranationalist and far right elements on *both* sides.

Ultra-Nationalists and the Far Right

The far right presence in the new Kiev government has been barely mentioned in the mainstream press in the United States, but it is significant and very troubling, even if its position in a ruling coalition is subject to change in the near future. For now, the far right Svoboda Party holds important positions: Svoboda’s Oleksandr Sych is deputy prime minister, the party’s Ihor Shvaik is agriculture minister, and Andriy Mokhnyk is ecology minister, while former Svoboda MP Oleg Mokhnytsky runs the general prosecutor’s office. (For Svoboda’s stated principles, see the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” program—“Program for the Protection of Ukrainians.”¹) Svoboda denies that it is fascist, and has gone to some lengths to distance its reputation from its neonazi origins and present itself as simply a right-wing nationalist party. However Svoboda’s racist and fascistic coloration persists: in 2004, Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok gave a speech calling for Ukrainians to fight against a “Muscovite-Jewish mafia,”² and celebrated the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists for having fought “Moscovites, Germans, Jews and other scum who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state.”³ In 2012 a high level Svoboda member, Yuri Sirotyuk, charged that the selection of pop star Gaitana, who was born in Ukraine to a Congolese father and Ukrainian mother, was a bad choice to represent the country in the Eurovision song contest because she was not authentically Ukrainian. “It looks like we don’t want to show our face and Ukraine will be associated with a different continent, somewhere in Africa.”⁴ Observers disagree about whether Svoboda is properly categorized as neofascist (I believe it is), but

there is no doubt that it is deeply reactionary.

[*Author's note, May 27:* This article was written before the May 25 elections. Election results indicate that, for now at least, the far right has very little popular support. As the Russian news service RT conceded about the presidential exit polls, "Ultra-right radical nationalists appeared to have completely failed in the elections, with Svoboda (Freedom) Party head Oleg Tyagnibok securing 1.17 percent of the vote and Right Sector leader Dmitry Yarosh less than one percent."⁵ At the time of writing this note, final voting results have not been confirmed, but they are described as approximating these very low figures. In the Kiev mayoral election, Svoboda may have fared somewhat better, though still not well: with 40 percent of the ballots counted, the party's candidate received 6.45 percent of the vote.⁶]

Although a strong case can be made that Svoboda is indeed neofascist, regardless of how one characterizes the party, Ukraine isn't today a fascist state; non-fascist neoliberal parties and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk [and, after May 25, Petro Poroshenko] lead the government and fascist measures have not been carried out. But it is an ominous sign that reactionary elements like Svoboda have been legitimized with government posts. In the absence of a successful left alternative, neoliberal austerity measures are likely to strengthen neofascist and far right forces—a dynamic we have seen in other parts of Europe, for example with the rise of Golden Dawn in Greece and the Front National in France. Recent steps taken by the new government give a foretaste of their plans: gas prices have been raised by 56 percent and it has been announced that 25,000 civil servants are to be laid off and child subsidies cut.

Ultra-nationalist and far right elements also play a significant role on the pro-Russian side. For example, as Tash Shifrin notes on her *Dream Deferred* website, "The Donbass People's Militia is led by Pavel Gubarev—a former member of fascist paramilitary organisation, Russian National Unity and of the Progressive Socialist

Party of Ukraine, which despite its name is allied with the Eurasian Youth Union linked to influential Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin."⁷ In his article on the anarchist-leaning website *tahririch*, Laurent Moeri reports that "there is very disturbing information about Chetniks having been invited to join Russians fighting together with the Cossack 'Wolves' (the 'Wolves' are a paramilitary organization known for their ruthlessness and have engaged in combat in Chechnya as well as in Georgia)."⁸ And in April 2014, Aleksandr Ivanov-Sukharevsky, leader of the Russian neo-Nazi Peoples National Party, addressed the pro-Russian forces in South-Eastern Ukraine giving them his full support (cited, with a photo of Sukharevsky speaking; this site shows many other examples of far right elements among the pro-Russian forces⁹).

Within Russia, Vladimir Putin has used the Ukrainian conflict to foster ultra-nationalist sentiments that buttress the increasing authoritarianism of his government, which is marked by hyper-patriotism, harsh anti-protest laws, repression of journalists, vicious discrimination against gays, and an unholy alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church that we saw on display in the cruel persecution of Pussy Riot. It's no surprise, then, that Putin and the Russian government are praised by far right forces throughout Europe, including Hungary's neo-Nazi Jobbik party, the British National Party, Golden Dawn in Greece, the Italian Fronte Nazionale, and Marine Le Pen's French Front National. (Ironically, Svoboda had observer status with the ultranationalist Alliance of European National Movements until March of this year, leaving only after leaders of the Alliance endorsed the annexation of Crimea by Russia.) Inside Crimea, the repressive consequences of being brought into Moscow's orbit are illustrated by the (failed) attempt to ban this month's Tatar commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the day the mass deportation of their families began under the orders of Josef Stalin, and the cancellation of the Gay Pride parade scheduled

for April 22-23 in light of the Russian law banning “gay propaganda.”¹⁰

MUCH HAS TO BE DONE to realize the democratic promise of the Maidan uprising. For starters, the Ukrainian people need to insist that Svoboda be removed from the governing coalition, and that the Kiev government repudiate its deadly deal with the EU and the IMF. But beyond these first necessary steps, ordinary Ukrainians across the country desperately need to create a democratic left movement, with member-controlled unions¹¹ and political parties that can represent them. They need new radical and socialist parties that can take major enterprises out of the hands of the oligarchs who dominate western, eastern, and southern Ukraine, nationalize them, and place them under the democratic control of workers and the larger society. They need parties that can build an independent Ukraine unaligned with either NATO or Russia, outside of the German-dominated European Union and the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union, and free to develop unrestricted trade relationships with all countries.

Ukrainians need an international environment that nourishes rather than thwarts democracy in their country, and that’s where we can help. We can express our solidarity with the Ukrainian people by demanding that Russia permanently withdraw its troops from the Ukrainian border and cease making interventionist threats, and that the West cease its escalating military presence in Europe, move to dismantle NATO, and withdraw its demands for privatization and austerity. We can call for aid without imperial strings to Ukraine and other countries in economic crisis. In supporting the Ukrainians, we are helping ourselves. After all, we all need a way out of the cruel world our masters have made.

May 20, 2014

Readers may also be interested in seeing the Campaign

for Peace and Democracy’s March 10, 2014 statement “Oppose NATO, Russian Intervention in Crimea, and the IMF,” www.cpdweb.org/letters/Ukraine.shtml.

NOTES

1. <http://en.svoboda.org.ua/about/program/>.
2. David Stern, “Svoboda: The Rise of Ukraine’s ultra-nationalists” www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20824693.
3. Cited in Per Anders Rudling, Ruth Wodak, and John E. Richardson, eds., *The Return of the Ukrainian Far Right: The Case of VO Svoboda* (Routledge, 2013), 229–247.
4. Maria Danilova, “Ukrainian party accused of racism in pop scandal,” Associated Press, Feb. 22, 2012, cnsnews.com/news/article/ukrainian-party-accused-racism-pop-scandal.
5. “Ukrainian oligarch Poroshenko leading pres race with over 50% votes,” *RT*, May 25, 2014, rt.com/news/161416-ukraine-exit-polls-poroshenko/.
6. “Klitschko receives over 56 percent of votes in Kyiv mayor elections after counting in 40 percent of wards,” *Kyiv Post*, May 27, 2014, www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/klitschko-receives-over-56-percent-of-votes-in-kyiv-mayor-elections-after-counting-in-40-percent-of-wards-349594.html.
7. Tash Shiffrin, “Ukraine slides towards civil war: don’t choose a side in battle of reaction,” *Dream Deferred*, May 5, 2014, www.dreamdeferred.org.uk/2014/05/ukraine-slides-towards-civil-war-there-is-no-good-side-to-choose/.
8. Laurent Moeri, “Excuse Me Mister: How Far Is It From Simferopol To Grozny?” May 19, 2014, tahriric.wordpress.com/2014/05/19/ukraine-excuse-me-mister-how-far-is-it-from-simferopol-to-grozny/.
9. Anton Shekhovtsov, “Russian and pro-Russian right-wing terrorists spreading fear and hate in Ukraine,” April 19, 2014, anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.de/2014/04/russian-and-pro-russian-right-wing.html.
10. See Daniel Reynolds, “Russia’s ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law Takes Effect in Crimea,” *Advocate*, May 1, 2014, www.advocate.com/world/2014/05/01/russias-gay-propaganda-law-takes-effect-crimea, cited by Kevin Anderson in his article in this issue, “Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Inter-imperialist Rivalry.”
11. Such unions are missing in Ukraine today. As Sean Larson notes in “Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine,” in this issue, “The opinion [among the public] predominates that trade unions are relics of the communist era for the purpose of organizing vacations or children’s summer camps (functions largely responsible for sustaining union membership) rather than fighting organizations pushing for the interests of workers on the job and in politics.”

Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Inter-imperialist Rivalry

KEVIN B. ANDERSON

UKRAINE CONSTITUTES a test not only for democratic movements, or the unevenly matched imperialisms of the U.S./EU and Russia, but also for the global left. As with other “difficult” moments like the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, Iran 2009, or the Libyan uprising, our support for democracy and human rights has in some quarters come into conflict with the long held stance that neoliberal capitalism, led by the United States, is the main danger confronting humanity. The Maidan uprising that toppled the oligarchical kleptocracy of Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine was not socialist or even social democratic. Moreover, Maidan was cheered on by the United States and the EU, which clearly sought advantage from it against Russia. This has led some on the left to lean toward Putin’s Russia and to shy away from supporting the Maidan uprising and Ukraine, even in the face of Russia’s takeover of Ukrainian territory and threats to dismember the country. This article takes a different stance. In the tradition of the

anti-Stalinist left and particularly the Marxist-Humanist stream of which I have long been a part, I maintain that we can and should support progressive democratic and popular movements, even when they undermine regimes that the U.S. government opposes, and at the same time, work to oppose U.S. war and hegemony.

The Maidan Movement: A Democratic Uprising on Putin’s Doorstep

The 2013-14 Ukrainian uprising showed the creativity of masses in motion and the ultimate fragility of state power, even when surrounded by a repressive police apparatus and enjoying the support of a foreign imperialist ally. The overthrow of the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich involved large-scale street protests of over 500,000 people and the occupation of Kiev’s central square, the Maidan, for weeks on end in the dead of winter. Despite support efforts by Russia and police repression that resulted in more than 100 deaths, in the end the regime collapsed. The police melted away, the army refused to attack the people, and Yanukovich fled for his life.

The Maidan uprising rattled Putin’s regime in Russia, which has experienced persistent democratic protests over the past two years, despite ever-increasing state repression. As the British journalist James Meek wrote: “Putin’s great fear is that the people of a future better Ukraine might inspire an entirely different unification with their East Slav brethren on his side of the border—a common cause of popular revolt against him and other leaders like him. The revolution on Maidan Nezalezhnosti—In-

KEVIN B. ANDERSON teaches in the departments of Sociology, Political Science, and Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the co-editor (with Peter Hudis) of *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (2004) and the author of *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study* (1995), *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (with Janet Afary, 2005), and *Marx at the Margins: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Non-Western Societies* (2010). He thanks Joanne Landy, Michael Pugliese, and Tony Saily for source material. Some parts of this article appeared previously in Anderson’s “Ukraine: Popular Uprising in the Shadow of Putin’s Russia,” ZNet, April 27, 2014.

dependence Square in Ukrainian—is the closest yet to a script for his own downfall” (*London Review of Books*, 3-20-14).

In a similar vein, the Ukrainian sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko held that in annexing Crimea, Putin was motivated not only by territorial and imperial motives, but also by the situation at home: “Crimea was necessary to increase patriotism among the Russian population, and to decrease any chance that the Russian opposition—which was very much inspired by Maidan—might attempt anything like that in Russia” (“For Ukrainians, as for any other people in the world, the main threat is capitalism,” *LeftEast*, April 30, 2014).

The Maidan uprising exhibited several contradictions, however. One revolved around the emergence of far right groups. Though only a small minority within the movement, these groups were well organized and prepared for street fighting. A recent report from an anarchist correspondent speaks to the relative strength of such groups: “The Maidan self-defense was organized in ‘groups of one hundred,’ with organizations or currents setting up their own group. All together there were about fifty such groups of one hundred. However, despite the name many groups were made up of not more than thirty or forty people. About ten groups were dominated by rightists or fascists, others expressed nationalist tendencies but with more liberal or democratic elements.” This account also mentions that the left was a very small, often marginalized part of the protests, sometimes due to attacks by right-wing groups. Nonetheless, some “anarchists, communists, and socialists” took part in an occupation by 300 students of the Ministry of Education in Kiev (“Ukraine: Report from a visit in Kiev in April 2014,” *libcom.org*, April 29, 2014). Thus, while notions of the uprising as fascist or reactionary were a fantasy put forth by Russian state propaganda, the emergence of the far right as a tendency is certainly a serious danger for the Ukrainian democratic movement.

A second contradiction within the Maidan movement concerned a major part of its agenda, that of affiliating with the European Union rather than Putin’s Eurasian Economic Union. This was the issue that sparked the initial protests in November 2013, as most Ukrainians were outraged by Yanukovich’s rejection of a pact with the EU, which they evidently saw as a way out of Putin’s increasingly authoritarian political and economic network. The EU offered a multibillion-dollar loan package in exchange for unspecified economic “reform.” Little account has been taken by the Ukrainian democratic movement, then or since, of the terrible human costs of the austerity measures the EU and other international lending agencies would demand in return for loans, above all cuts in salaries and pensions and hikes in prices of basic commodities. And this in a country already teetering on the edge of economic collapse.

This lacuna was rooted in the fact that the working class did not appear under its own banner, and in the weakness of the left, which meant that the democratic uprising lacked a socio-economic, let alone an anti-capitalist, dimension. There have been some small protests with an economic dimension, however, as recounted by the abovementioned anarchist correspondent: “On April 9 we went to a protest rally of social workers in front of a government building near Maidan. [They] are the first to be sacked after the agreement with the IMF. About 200 people (from different parts of the Ukraine) came to this ... rally outside the government building. Many workers showed up with self-drawn banners and slogans like proposing to the government: ‘Let’s exchange salaries,’ ‘Start the cuts with yourself,’ and ‘The reforms suppose improvements and not unemployment and poverty!’ Most workers are women.”

A third contradiction involved the narrow form of Ukrainian nationalism that dominated much of the uprising, as well as the new Kiev government. Thus, as Yanukovich was falling from power, parliament, which by now had gone

over to the opposition, conducted a fateful vote to repeal the 2012 language law that had placed Russian on an equal footing with Ukrainian as a national language. Even though the repeal never took effect due to a veto by the acting president, huge political damage was done, giving a powerful propaganda tool to Putin and his allies in eastern Ukraine, where Russian speakers are the vast majority. Moreover, many eastern Ukrainians rightly feared that the kind of neoliberal policies favored by those coming to power in Kiev would open the industrialized Donbass region to competition from cheaper foreign imports of manufactured goods, resulting in mass layoffs.

Despite these contradictions, the Ukrainian uprising was on the whole a positive event, one that showed both the power and the creativity of a mass democratic movement in a region marked by increasing authoritarianism. Moreover, it actually succeeded in toppling a government, a rare event anywhere. This shook up not only Ukraine, but Russia as well, and also worried regimes as far away as Iran, where a dispute broke out between reformist and conservative newspapers (“La révolution ukrainienne dérange les conservateurs en Iran,” *Le Monde*, 2-28-14).

Inter-imperialist Rivalries and International Solidarity

Within days of Yanukovich’s fall, Putin moved to annex Crimea, a territory that Russia has long claimed and which has one of its most important naval bases. Crimea has a clear majority of Russian speakers, plus lots of Russian military personnel residing there, although there is also a significant minority of predominantly Muslim Crimean Tatars (12 percent of the population), as well as of Ukrainian speakers (24 percent). These minorities were almost completely silenced during a snap sham election in which an improbable turnout of 80 percent was claimed, and an old, USSR-style majority of 97 percent supposedly voted to break off from Ukraine and join Russia.

The democratic uprising lacked a socio-economic, let alone an anti-capitalist, dimension.

Putin’s annexation of Crimea resulted in sanctions and threats from the U.S./EU to isolate Russia, all of which carried the flavor of a new Cold War. The United States has shed its usual crocodile tears over Crimea, even as it occupies Guantanamo, an enclave carved out of Cuban soil. In fact, Putin’s whole comportment since the Maidan uprising, with 40,000 troops massed on the border and belligerent statements about protecting Russian minorities everywhere, is nearly a mirror image of the way Washington has traditionally behaved toward Latin America.

A different type of international response was that of cross-border democratic and anti-imperialist solidarity. Inside Russia, the democratic opposition mounted a remarkably large, 50,000-strong demonstration on the eve of the Crimea referendum, March 15. Slogans included “Hands off Ukraine” and “No to war.” A much smaller counter-demonstration took place under the slogan, “There will be no Maidan in Moscow” (*Le Monde*, 3-16-14). That is probably true for now, but the specter of Maidan surely haunts Putin, even as his jingoism has temporarily jacked up his popularity ratings. The annexation of Crimea was also condemned by a lopsided vote in the UN General Assembly.

It is often mentioned by those parts of the left that have been reluctant to support the Maidan uprising—and by international experts of the “realist” school—that NATO has extended itself into most of Eastern Europe and the Baltics since 1991, in violation of assurances given to Russia’s leaders as the Soviet Union was collapsing. To be sure, NATO has acted in true imperialist fashion, taking advantage of its former rival’s weakness, in a form of veiled aggression that sowed huge distrust from the

Russian state and people. Despite U.S./EU claims today that they are only interested in an economic partnership with Ukraine, not NATO membership, it should be remembered that Vice President Joe Biden declared during a visit to Kiev in 2009 that the United States would “strongly support” such a move (Ellen Barry, “Biden Says U.S. Still Backs Ukraine in NATO,” *New York Times*, July 23, 2009, A8). Chastened by the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a public dead-set against more foreign adventures, and the sapping of its resources during the Great Recession, the U.S. government now speaks more softly. However, the overall goal of world domination has by no means been shelved.

What of Russian imperialism, vastly weakened since 1991? In this regard, it must equally be said that critics of U.S. and Western imperialism seldom mention that Putin has, like the United States with regard to NATO and Russia, violated the guarantees that Russia gave in 1994, when, along with Washington and London, it signed onto the Budapest Memorandum. In that agreement, the three powers pledged to respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity in return for its agreement to give up its nuclear arsenal, then the third largest in the world. Ukraine did so by 1996, making it one of the only countries in the world, along with South Africa, to have given up its nuclear weapons.

Moreover, I would also argue that claims about Russia’s sphere of influence being undermined by the United States and NATO follow an imperialist logic, one that the left needs to question in all of its forms, whether that sphere is dominated by Washington or by another global or regional power.

Kerry and Obama tout their democratic credentials in supporting the Maidan uprising or in opposing Russian thuggery in Ukraine, but they remain silent about issues closer to home like the conviction of Occupy Wall Street activist Cecily McMillan, whose “offense” consisted of elbowing a cop who had grabbed her breasts

during a crackdown on a 2012 demonstration. In a remarkable expression of internationalism from below, two Putin opponents from the Pussy Riot group, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, made a solidarity visit to McMillan at the Rikers Island jail. “It was a very bad decision to put her in jail,” said Tolokonnikova. The two Russian activists knew of whence they spoke, having finished their own jail terms earlier this year. (James McKinley, “Like-Minded Russians Visit Occupy Wall Street Inmate at Rikers Island,” *New York Times*, May 9, 2014, A19).

Eastern Ukraine and the Danger of Civil War

In a number of cities in eastern Ukraine where Russian speakers predominate, the largest of them Donetsk (population 1 million), heavily armed pro-Putin militants have taken over government buildings. The extent of the involvement of Russian intelligence operatives is unclear. The level of popular support for these irredentists who advocate breaking off and joining Russia is even less clear. First, it should be noted that they have not been able to take over Kharkiv (population 1.5 million), eastern Ukraine’s largest city. Second, while some have seen an equivalency between these protests and the Maidan uprising, the level of mass participation is much lower. Third, a Pew Research Center poll released on May 8 found high levels of support for a united Ukraine in all regions: “Among Ukrainians, 77% say Ukraine should remain united, compared with 14% who think regions should be permitted to secede if they so desire.... A smaller majority (70%) in the country’s east—which includes areas along the Black Sea and the border with Russia—also prefer unity.” Finally, it should be noted that the public face of these occupations includes many very doubtful figures, for example, Denis Pushilin in Donetsk, whose earlier claim to fame was as a swindler in a large Ponzi scheme.

But as the Pew poll also shows, support for a

unified Ukraine is not the same thing as support for the current government in Kiev, composed of politicians from previous regimes, most of them with ties to corrupt oligarchs: only 41 percent of the population hold a favorable view of it, with some regional differences.

On May 11, secessionist militants held a much-disputed referendum on “self-rule” for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In the days before, Putin gave mixed signals about this step, even asking at one point for it to be postponed. The results of the poll were predictably one-sided, but the actual level of participation was unclear. It was also unclear whether Putin would actually move to incorporate these two eastern regions, as he had with Crimea. What was clear was that this exercise was designed to disrupt the nationwide Ukrainian elections scheduled for May 25, where almost all observers were predicting a landslide victory at a national level (although not in parts of the East) for candidates claiming to support the legacy of the Maidan uprising.

A week before the referendum, the first serious clashes between pro-Russian militants and those supporting a united Ukraine took place in the large southern port city of Odessa, with more than 40 pro-Russians killed. While the exact details are in dispute, the following account conveyed to me by a sociologist with good contacts in Odessa and longstanding ties to the anti-Stalinist left rings true:

There was a “pro-Russian” encampment in the city. Its members are armed.... On Friday, the “pro-Ukrainian” forces marched for national unity. The “pro-Russians” attacked them. It is my belief ... that the police stayed idly by when the “pro-Russians” attacked them. In the ensuing battle, the heavily outnumbered “pro-Russians” were defeated and split into two groups. One went into a building, and fighting continued. The armed “pro-Russians” were shooting from inside the building at their opponents—some of whom improvised Molotov cocktails and threw them. The building burned with horrible results.... What does all that amount to? The “pro-Russians” have been

trying, without success, to seize Odessa; they tried to attack a demonstration that opposed them; and they were defeated. This is not a coldly calculated massacre—it is the kind of tragedy that happens when a near civil war situation is developing.

Even though it wasn’t a coldly calculated massacre, which needs to be said, it of course also needs to be said that some grotesque emotions were expressed by some of the “pro-Ukrainians” as they saw the building burning and people dying. Odessa shows the danger, not only of Russian irredentism, but also of a narrow Ukrainian nationalism. This form of nationalism, as in the vote against the Russian language, or the more recent ill-conceived attempts by the very weak Ukrainian military to intervene with force in the East, are only serving to increase support for separatism there.

Putin’s Amalgam of Neo-Stalinism and Pan-Slavism

Putin’s regime espouses a neo-Stalinist ideology that regards the collapse of the USSR as a tragedy. Reeking of Russian chauvinism, this worldview also contains elements of older versions of Czarist Pan-Slavism, especially the notion of “protecting” Russian minorities abroad. This odd combination is seen in how Putin reveres the conservative Slavophile Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (who denied the existence of a Ukrainian nation separate from Russia), even as he expresses nostalgia for the Stalinist regime that imprisoned him. Putin confirmed that view on March 12 of this year when he telephoned Mustafa Dzhomelev, a venerated leader of the Crimean Tatar minority. Putin was ostensibly trying to reassure the Tatars that they would not be persecuted under Russian rule, as they had in the Soviet Union, which deported them en masse to Central Asia in 1944. But as a stunned Dzhomelev reported, Putin also suggested that Ukraine’s 1991 independence from the former Soviet Union had lacked validity: “Putin noted the issue that self-proclamation of independent

Ukraine did not quite correspond to the Soviet norms that stipulated withdrawal procedure from the USSR structure” (“Ukraine withdrew from USSR not quite legitimately,” QHA-Crimean News Agency, 3-13-14; see also Sylvie Kaufmann, “Après la Crimée, un autre monde,” *Le Monde*, 3-17-14).

These issues have a deep resonance in Russian and Ukrainian history. Lenin castigated Russian chauvinism, going so far as to support Ukraine’s right to independence:

If Finland, Poland, or Ukraine secede from Russia, there is nothing bad in that. What is wrong with it? Anyone who says that is a chauvinist. One must be mad to continue Czar Nicholas’s policy.... This is a repudiation of the tactics of internationalism, this is chauvinism at its worst. What is wrong with Finland seceding? ... The proletariat cannot use force, because it must not prevent the peoples from obtaining their freedom” (Speech on the National Question, Seventh All-Russia Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Party-Bolshevik, April 29 [May 12], 1917).

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek has noted this revolutionary heritage in a recent article defending Ukraine’s national rights against Russia:

The golden era of Ukrainian national identity was not tsarist Russia—where Ukrainian national self-assertion was thwarted—but the first decade of the Soviet Union, when Soviet policy in a Ukraine exhausted by war and famine was “indigenisation.” Ukrainian culture and language were revived, and rights to healthcare, education and social security introduced. Indigenisation followed the principles formulated by Lenin in quite unambiguous terms (“Barbarism with a Human Face,” *London Review of Books*, May 8, 2014).

The tragedy of Russia 1917, a revolution that transformed into its opposite, continues to haunt both Russia and Ukraine today, even after the collapse of the USSR.

Some very telling indications of what the pro-Putin forces have in mind for eastern Ukraine are foreshadowed by the first weeks of Russian rule in Crimea. If one holds that the

position of subordinated minorities, ethnic and sexual, is a key measure of a political order’s progressive or reactionary character, two disturbing trends can already be noted. (1) Persecution of the Tatars: Dzhomelev has been barred from returning to Crimea after a trip to Kiev, prompting a demonstration by 2,000 Tatars at the border as he tried to return (“Crimée: heurts entre Tatars et forces de l’ordre,” *Le Monde*, May 4, 2013). (2) Persecution of the LGBT community: the Pride parade scheduled for April 22-23 has been cancelled in light of Russian law banning “gay propaganda,” as the entire community feels a deep chill, with some planning to emigrate as soon as possible (Daniel Reynolds, “Russia’s ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law Takes Effect in Crimea,” *Advocate*, May 1, 2014).

The terrible legacies of Stalinist famine and deportation, and of Nazi occupation and the Holocaust, as well as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, all weigh down upon Ukraine and the region today, both as memory and as foreboding for the future. So does the danger of an ethno-regional civil war, as in the Balkans during the 1990s. Ukraine faces a deep crisis today, economically, politically, and culturally. It is caught between two rival imperialisms at a time of deep economic and social crisis. Its path forward is by no means a clear one, especially since its democratic movement has abstained from addressing the oppressions of capital and class, and is being hemmed in by U.S./EU austerity. Nonetheless, in staging not one but two mass democratic uprisings over the past decade, the Ukrainian people have shown a yearning for self-determination in the broadest sense, and for grassroots democracy. To be sure, Ukrainian nationalist excesses, as in Odessa, illustrate the deep contradictions within this democratic agenda. Overall though, the Maidan uprising and its aftermath have challenged the regional imperialist power, Russia, whose increasingly authoritarian regime is working night and day in an effort to make sure Ukraine’s democratic experiment ends in miserable failure.

Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine

SEAN LARSON

UKRAINIAN CAPITALISM today is distinguished by the most fortified oligarchy of the post-Soviet states. Politics in Ukraine have been subject to volatile lurches over the last decade, driven by the direct involvement of masses of Ukrainians. Meanwhile, shaping the economic, political, and ideological aspects of society and daily life in Ukraine is a ubiquitous inter-imperialist competition between Russia on the one side and the United States and the European Union on the other. Indeed, the accumulation of capital in this country is constantly conditioned and threatened both by these imperialisms and internal social upheavals. The actions and positions of the ruling class have been and will continue to be staked out upon the terrain delineated by their contradictions.

The following attempts to sketch the contours of the various sections of the ruling class in Ukraine, with an eye toward their fractures, determinations, and the central role of the oligarchy. In characterizing the different fractions of the Ukrainian ruling class, economic, and not political or ideological, determinations are decisive. The actions of the oligarchs are most productively explained through the prism of pure class interests, economic competition, and the political power blocs that derive therefrom, rather than fidelity to any transcendental ideologies of nationalism or democracy. It is hoped that this sketch of the balance of forces can contribute to further analysis of the often

chaotic and confusing developments in the post-Maidan Ukraine of today.

Oligarchy

Most of the oligarchs acquired control over large sectors of the Ukrainian economy during the rapid privatizations after the fall of the Soviet Union. A fifth of Ukraine's GDP is controlled by twenty people, and in 2012, the combined henchmen of two oligarchs (Akhmetov and Firtash) constituted a fifth of the elected representatives in the 450-person parliament. Oligarchs are essentially exempt from all taxes on their profits, and the Ukrainian state is frequently bent with surprising pliability to enrich them and deter domestic and foreign challenges to their power. These shared class interests have predominated even through all the maneuvers between rival groups of oligarchs for control of the state apparatus. The interests of the oligarchs have thus formed the horizon of possibility for Ukrainian politics, though their hegemony has been far from uncontested (see below). It is in the industrial sector (metallurgy, chemical industry, natural gas, machine-building, automobile- and ship-building, among others) that the presence of the oligarchs is most prominent, where a few individuals wield not only economic, but political power over entire industries. However, the largest and most powerful oligarchs have branched out into other sectors as well, with assets spanning the service sector, retail, media, and banking. In Ukraine, oligarchy thus represents a unique combination of multiple forms of capital (industrial, financial, commercial) with direct control over the levers

SEAN LARSON is a doctoral candidate in German Studies at New York University and a socialist activist.

of state power.

To exemplify how this plays out, take two key areas of activity of Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov: metallurgy and power engineering.¹ In June 2010, Akhmetov prevented a significant expansion of Russian capital in the

In Ukraine, the oligarchy thus represents a unique combination of multiple forms of capital (industrial, financial, commercial) with direct control over the levers of state power.

metallurgical industry by having the recently appointed Prime Minister from his Party of Regions, Mykola Azarov, invalidate the sale of Ukraine's second largest metallurgical plant as an attempt at an illegal takeover. In 2011, Akhmetov's companies acquired from the state 1) leases over companies controlling over 50 percent of energy coal production in Ukraine, 2) controlling stakes in three power plant complexes as part of tenders (ensuring Akhmetov control of 30 percent of Ukraine's electricity production), and 3) demonstrable preferential treatment (even against state-owned companies) in the purchase of tenders for electricity export to Ukraine's neighbors. This meant that by the end of 2011, Akhmetov had secured himself an integrated production chain, using his own coal as fuel in his own power plants to produce electricity distributed through his own export contracts. This is not to mention that Akhmetov also has significant assets in media, transportation, finance (having recently merged two of his banks), and retail trade, and his group HarvEast is now one of the best positioned to seize large portions of the agricultural market as its privatization begins to accelerate.

Orange Fragments

Given this context, Ukraine is not known for its free market. On the contrary, it is consistently ranked among the bottom rungs on so-called "economic freedom" indicators (155 out of 178 on the 2014 Heritage Index of Economic Freedom).² This state of affairs has led to discontent within the ruling elite during Ukraine's post-Soviet history. However, while the (largely industrial) oligarchs have been able to act in concert to institutionally dominate the state, other sections of the ruling class have struggled to maintain a coherent power bloc.

The so-called 'Orange Revolution' of 2004, although involving hundreds of thousands of protestors in the street, has been dubbed the "revolt of the millionaires against the billionaires" largely due to its outcome. This event brought a political alliance to power that was led by a small section of big capital and had its base mainly in small business owners. Although this alliance consisted of diverse tendencies and motivations, they have long been interested in the regulation of economic competition and establishing the 'rule of law' in order to level the economic playing field with the more powerful oligarchs. Even today, the Orange ideology consists primarily in making the exploitation of workers an equal opportunity affair. Many of the more powerful oligarchs feared the liberal reforms promised in the rhetoric of the Orange power bloc which had consolidated against them, not to mention the more populist slogans (e.g. "send the crooks to prison") of one of its leaders, Yulia Tymoshenko. The initial plan of the oligarchs was to have Viktor Yanukovich administer their political affairs as president, but mass protests at an election fraud and material support from Washington brought the Orange leader Viktor Yushchenko to power instead.

The delicate unity of the Orange bloc, along with its economic inferiority, made it weak and unable to sustain itself against the interests of the bigger oligarchs without the added pres-

sure from below. Less than two years after the elections, a split within the Orange bloc and an inability to form a parliamentary coalition paralyzed the state, preventing it from carrying out even minimal economic reforms. In these circumstances, the takeover of Yushchenko's erstwhile oppositional "Our Ukraine" party by sectional oligarchic interests was inevitable, which led to small business shuffling its allegiances within the Orange framework during the parliamentary elections of 2006 toward the more radical pole of the Orange coalition, 'Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko.' Between 2005-2010, the financial sector was also largely behind Tymoshenko's Bloc, including the brothers Buriak (owners of the Brokbiznes Bank, one of Ukraine's largest financial institutions) and Kostyantyn Zhevago, who heads the Finance and Credit Group. Ihor Kolomoyskyi and Henadiy Boholyubov of the Privat Group, who own Ukraine's largest bank, alternately backed different wings of the Orange coalition depending on their needs. In the run-up to the 2010 elections, however, Tymoshenko further undermined the economic backing of her own bloc through zealous populist policies that had particularly negative consequences for small businesses and the banking sector.³

The Working Class

All of these capitalists, of course, rely upon the continuous exploitation of the Ukrainian working class. In rough outline, slightly less than a quarter of Ukraine's working population is employed in the industrial sector, just over half of the workforce is in the service sector (healthcare, education, communications, trade, etc.), and almost a tenth of workers are in public administration, while the official unemployment rate has fluctuated around 8.3 percent over the last decade, peaking during the economic crisis.⁴

In the post-Soviet sphere, the development of independent workers' political and economic organizations faces its own particular difficulties. Such organizations are essentially nonexistent,

and representation is instead directly mediated by the state in the form of the trade unions and the parties of the oligarchs. In an increasingly dire economic situation, with months of unpaid wages in some industries, shrinking pensions, and rising unemployment, the willingness of union members to take action is quite low. This is due not only to intimidation tactics by bosses, but also to a lack of confidence in both the efficacy of direct actions and in unions as an institution. Mounting discontent with this situation, in both the east and west of Ukraine, has for the most part been channeled through other ideological institutions. According to an opinion poll from the beginning of 2013,⁵ Ukrainians had far less confidence in trade unions as institutions than they did in the Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian media, the courts, and political parties. The opinion predominates that trade unions are relics of the communist era for the purpose of organizing vacations or children's summer camps (functions largely responsible for sustaining union membership) rather than fighting organizations pushing for the interests of workers on the job and in politics. Even the minuscule attempts at rank-and-file activism must contend with the fact that the political influence of the unions is severely limited by their organizational weakness, as well as disunity among the different union federations.⁶ Indeed, there is almost no mutual support organized for protest actions among unions, and alliances are merely formalities to satisfy requirements for political representation. In addition, trade unions in Ukraine have faced the same difficulty as their counterparts in Western countries when confronted with organizing the growing informal sector and 'precarious' service jobs.

The Imperialist Contradiction

In its economic, political, and even ideological aspects, the entirety of Ukrainian society is continuously animated by an inter-imperialist rivalry between the United States and the European Union on the one side, and Russia on

the other. By means of alternately suppressing and deferring this contradiction, the Ukrainian oligarchy has carefully prevented it from coming to a head, and thereby retained their power.

Before the emergence of the Maidan movement in late 2013 and early 2014, Russia sought to include Ukraine in the Eurasian Customs Union, which was and is an attempt to build an economic bloc capable of competing with the EU, but more powerful because it would have a common military strategy. Not only would it culminate in a powerful geopolitical bloc, but the EU itself would be almost completely reliant upon it for energy and natural resources. The position the Ukrainian oligarchs have taken with regard to the potential customs union has been contradictory, as has been evident throughout the years of negotiations. Ukrainian industry relies upon Russian gas, especially in the chemical sector. Remaining outside the customs union has kept gas prices significantly higher than otherwise, and has contributed to the decline in competitiveness of Ukrainian plants. Russian manipulation of gas prices has significantly increased Ukraine's trade deficit, a fact Russia has attempted to use to force Ukraine to either join the Customs Union or merge Ukraine's gas pipeline controller Naftogaz with the Russian state-owned Gazprom. Whether through access to a newly unprotected market by Russian businesses or the new possibility of unfettered manipulation of the gas supply, the sharp limitations upon Ukraine's economic sovereignty in either case would comprise the economic content of Russian imperialism.

Yet the Western alternative has not only threatened the living standards of ordinary Ukrainians, it has also posed an economic threat to many oligarchs. Despite their diverging and conflicting interests and fickle maneuvers in the contest over the state apparatus, all oligarchs have held an interest in common: preventing the introduction of regulated and strictly enforced free markets to Ukraine, as this would significantly impact their infrastructure of profit

extraction, and open up the Ukrainian market to competition from Western corporations. From the perspective of the oligarchs, political candidates are to be selected and supported insofar as they are politically pliable and present a low risk of change being introduced into the system. The majority of oligarchs backed Yanukovich in the 2010 presidential elections against Tymoshenko precisely because he was considered a weak president (as was Yushchenko, in the last analysis). Affiliating with the West in the form of IMF loans and the EU Association Agreement would to a certain extent begin to reverse this form of oligarchs' direct dominance over the state as Western imperialist interests play an increasingly dominant role in the state and economy.

Thus, *maintaining the balancing act between imperialisms*, precarious and contradictory as it always was, has been the domestic and foreign policy interest driving the oligarchic bloc. Ukraine was hit hard by the economic crisis of 2007-08, with its GDP plummeting by 15 percent in 2009. The crisis dramatically impacted the country's capacity for economic independence, as up to 60 percent of Ukraine's GDP is reliant upon exports. When combined with the growing gas deficit, this situation made ever more urgent a decision on alignment with Russia or the West. Suppressing the imperialist contradiction through illicit protectionism or deferring it through postponing a decision was thus made all the more difficult. In mid-2013, the economic crisis in Ukraine reached its pinnacle,⁷ fusing mounting economic and social discontent as they moved toward the surface. Yanukovich's rejection of the EU Association Agreement, the last attempt by the oligarchy to *defer the imperialist contradiction*, proved utterly impotent in the face of a social upheaval whose time had come.

Recomposition and Restructuring

Riding the wave of the Maidan movement, a neoliberal power bloc was brought to power and

promptly began betraying that very movement. The new power bloc attempting to consolidate hegemony over the state and society is comprised of three major economic trends: oligarchs increasingly reliant upon Western markets, finance capital domestic and foreign, and small business owners. The first group comes partly from within the industrial oligarchy itself, and is driven toward an association with the West by a combination of the collapsing Russian economy facing stagflation and capital flight, and a need for state stability after growing frustration with Yanukovich's overstepping his role through his personal usage of the state to enrich his family and attempting to enter oligarch territory. Although the westward-looking oligarchs remain to a significant extent dependent upon the Russian market, the undependability of the latter is making the long-delayed shift to the west increasingly unavoidable. Leading members of this group include oligarchs such as Pinchuk and Poroshenko, the latter of whom also had his imports into Russia restricted by Moscow. The second section of the rising new power bloc is finance capital. Today, independent finance capital in Ukraine is comparatively weak. In 2012, the banking sector—consistently described by international financial institutions as one of the weakest in the region—was distinguished by a large share of foreign investors (39 percent) and a comparatively low level of oligarch presence, with only two of the ten largest banks (which in total control 54 percent of the assets in the banking sector) owned by oligarchs (Privat and FUIB). The most powerful oligarch of the finance sector, Kolomoyskyi (whose Privat Bank is Ukraine's largest) has long been politically oppositional toward the ruling industrial oligarchs: he was staunchly in the Orange camp in 2004, and in early March of this year he was enlisted by the provisional Kiev government to be governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region in the East. The third major component of the aspiring power bloc is the class of 'entrepreneurs' and small business owners, in other words, the

petty bourgeoisie. In Ukraine, this class has a history of coming out *en masse* against perceived oligarchic abuse of power.⁸ Given the economic heterogeneity of this rising power bloc then,

The opinion predominates that
trade unions are relics of the
communist era for the purpose of
organizing vacations rather than
fighting organizations pushing for
the interests of workers.

its corresponding ideology is expressed as a motley mixture of 1) *pro-European sentiment* (with demands for both reliable rule-of-law in the economic sphere and political democracy), 2) *nationalism* (consolidating around "our" oligarchs and opposed specifically to the historic colonizer, Russia), and 3) *neo-fascism* (the fascist Svoboda party takes pride in its exclusively middle class funding). The militarization and xenophobia of the fascist component also play an important and increasingly dangerous role in diverting class anger away from the capitalists within this coalition.

These economic and ideological components of the new power bloc find their political articulations in the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms (UDAR) party headed by Petro Poroshenko and Vitali Klitschko, the Fatherland party headed by Yulia Tymoshenko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and the Svoboda party headed by Oleh Tyahnybok. UDAR and the westward-looking oligarchs backing it occupy the strongest position in this coalition; their interests determine its direction in the last instance. The pro-European nationalism of the Fatherland party serves as an ideological palliative shoring up working and middle class support with anti-corruption rhetoric, but it has

also played a political leadership role along with UDAR, despite the inferiority of the economic forces behind Fatherland. Although initially relatively small, the influence of fascism (politically represented by Svoboda and the Right

Ukrainian society is continuously animated by an inter-imperialist rivalry between the United States and the European Union on the one side, and Russia on the other.

Sector) has grown in proportion to the inability of the new power bloc to consolidate hegemony over a unitary state. This is manifested most strikingly through the increasing reliance of this bloc upon militarized fascist militias and street gangs during the “Anti-Terrorist Operation” to quell rising discontent in eastern Ukraine.

Part of the difficulty this power bloc has had in retaining political power lies not only in its internal contradictions, but also in the nature of the state apparatus itself. The economic interests of the (primarily industrial) oligarchy, dependent as it is on the stability of the Ukrainian social formation, required, on the political level, *simultaneously* a weak state to instrumentalize and upon which to impose its interests, and a strong state with which to protect Ukrainian economic sovereignty and resist the ever-present imperial impositions from both East and West. The state inherited by the new power bloc had undergone a comprehensive centralization and shift to executive dominance under Yanukovych. It was thereby designed for maximum domestic instrumentalization by the powerful oligarchs, a group to which Yanukovych’s family itself increasingly aspired. In practice this meant the continued deferral of imperialist impositions:

under Yanukovych the size of the Ukrainian armed forces was considerably reduced while the riot police were fortified. This state apparatus was built to stabilize the teeming contradictions of Ukrainian social relations under the hegemony of the existing oligarch bloc and its interests, not the interests that comprise the current Kiev government. This is illustrated by the fact that the provisional government was plagued by inconsistent and undisciplined parliamentary support, with frequent failures to meet vote quotas and lack of motivation due to a blinkered focus on the May elections. But it is seen most apparently in the disintegration of the repressive apparatus that has led the provisional Kiev government to alternate repeated hollow threats to uprisings in the east with the mobilization of fascist militarized elements for spectacular displays of impotent violence, which are not a particularly telling sign of a stable hegemony.

In its attempt to secure this hegemony over the entirety of a unified Ukraine, the new power bloc has relied upon the political and economic supplement of Western imperialism. The intersection of its economic interests with its reliance upon the IMF loans points toward both more stable trade deals with the West as well as the introduction of neoliberal reforms in Ukraine. Although all oligarchs will benefit from the increased access to Western markets (even more of a necessity with Russia’s impending economic downturn), there will be a trade-off for some of them (beyond the social disaster of austerity, which the oligarchs are more than willing to tolerate for the sake of profit). In order to make the investment climate more attractive, part of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and the legal apparatus will involve combatting the arbitrary practices of the oligarchs used to support and expand their wealth, such as the raiding practices that reached unprecedented levels after Yanukovych took power and which affected medium-sized Ukrainian businesses and foreign businesses alike. This conflict in

oligarchic interests marks the Western aspect of the imperialist contradiction that has resulted in the political inertia of many industrial oligarchs. The intensity of this impasse has contributed to the halting and contradictory nature of the re-condensation of the state apparatus since February. However, the crisis in the social formation triggered by the autonomous actions of the Maidan mass movement has resulted in the majority of the oligarchs passively supporting the Western-backed Kiev government initially. What at first appeared to be the likely endurance of the neoliberal power bloc has begun to demand the tenuous participation of more of the larger industrial oligarchs, and will lead to a shift in their own economic activities should the process continue.

The most formidable challenge to the hegemony of the new bloc has been posed by the actions of Russia and mass discontent in eastern Ukraine. Based upon the interests in the Customs Union and the gas supply manipulation outlined above, Russia has attempted to undermine the legitimacy and position of the new Ukrainian authorities on the international stage through internal destabilization, thereby preventing the loss of Ukraine from the de facto Russian sphere of influence, and forcing a resolution to the crisis of Ukrainian society on Moscow's terms. At the moment, this is achieved through cynically emphasizing the legitimacy and independence of the eastern separatists. Should the turmoil in the East continue and gain the upper hand, oligarchs with industrial and political bases there will most likely use the resulting decentralization of the state or federalization to attempt to ward off the regulations of the EU association while keeping access to western markets open by retaining connection to the Ukrainian state. However, none of this should distract from the fact that working Ukrainians in both East and West have compelling reasons of their own not to accept either of the imperialist futures.

Internal Resistance

The Eastern Ukrainian economy has traditionally bankrolled the poorer West of the country, and the manufacturing and coal mining based there comprise 35 percent of Ukraine's exports. Association with the EU will lead to tougher production standards, the decline of Ukrainian coal and metallurgy industries, and loss of jobs in the East of Ukraine, whereas Russia has little need for Ukraine's coal mines. The social inequality already endemic to the oligarchic capitalist system will thus be amplified throughout these regions, regardless of which imperialism wins out. Protest against this inequality, whether targeting the oligarchs or the austerity programs from the West, has struggled to achieve a voice independent of the omnipresent inter-imperialist rivalry. Complete lack of organization makes the discontent of Eastern Ukrainians susceptible to Russian influence and the packaged solution on hand of separatism or federalization, and the discontent has as of yet no independent political expression. At present, the clashes in the East are spiraling Ukraine toward civil war. The very visible presence of fascists on both sides is a symptom of the growing embattlement of the ruling classes at the source of the conflict.

In recent years, many trade unions have been forbidden or had union leaders fired in enterprises belonging to multinational corporations—these are generally more difficult spaces in which to organize. The new trade agreement with the EU would open up Ukraine to a greater role for the multinationals, and thus further weaken the capacity of the working class to organize itself. The relative isolation of Ukrainian unions from practical solidarity with international unions will need to be broken as these multinational firms and their Western political backers begin taking over larger sections of the Ukrainian labor market and determining Ukrainian economic policy. The historically most class-conscious part of the working class and the best positioned politically right now are

the miners of the Donbass region. These miners' unions have already shown small signs of political activity and uneven involvement with the uprisings of the East, and even spoken of a political strike, which has once before (1989) proven to be the key link in the chain that exploded the entire contradictory social formation. Yet the trade unions of the mining industry have had divided allegiances, as Nick Evans points out: "Imperial competition between the U.S. and Europe, and Russia, and splits between the different oligarchic blocs in the Ukraine are reflected in the bureaucracy of the respective sections of the trade union movement."

Prospects for a socially just resolution to the crisis are bleak. But the germs of genuine resistance persevere. The elements of the Maidan, drawn from all over the country, that fought for democracy and against the deterioration of their living standards, will soon be just as dissatisfied with the IMF-imposed austerity as they were with Yanukovych. Now, though, they have yet another experience of popular uprising that has played a determining role in politics, even if not carried all the way through due to lack of effective left organizations.

A grassroots anti-imperialism opposed to the ruling classes of both East and West is the precondition for the resolution of the imperialist contradiction on the terms of the working class. Crucial to any future unification strategy will be the linking of anti-austerity protests with anti-imperialism, the expansion of the trade union movement to the informal sector, and the creation of popular democratic institutions and eventually independent political parties. Popular struggle on all of these fronts, and their eventual unification, will be required to melt the ideological cement binding the workers of the West to the nationalists of the ruling class and replace it with a class-conscious counter-hegemonic project. The return of Maidan activists to their

hometowns, spread all across the country, has laid the infrastructure of a united cross-regional movement in a way that can lead to grassroots protests exceeding the bounds of the narrow ruling-class political oscillations of the last decade. Today, as murderous imperialisms and the onslaught of Ukrainian capitalism rage on, one thing is clear as the dawn: it is the oligarchs of all stripes who are responsible for the misery of the Ukrainian people, and it is the oligarchs who will need to be targeted by workplace actions and political protests if the people of Ukraine are to begin taking their future into their own hands.

May 12, 2014

NOTES

1. Cf. Sławomir Matuszak, *The Oligarchic Democracy: The Influence of Business Groups on Ukrainian Politics*, (Warsaw: Center for Eastern Studies, 2012), 53-54, www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_42_en.pdf.
2. Heritage Foundation, 2014 Index of Economic Freedom, www.heritage.org/index/ranking.
3. Cf. Sławomir Matuszak and Arkadiusz Sarna, *From Stabilisation to Stagnation: Viktor Yanukovych's Reforms*, (Warsaw: Center for Eastern Studies, 2013), 21, www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw_32_ang_net.pdf.
4. www.ukrstat.gov.ua/.
5. Ukraine-2013: In-Between Elections and Options (assessments), 2013, www.razumkov.org.ua/upload/Ukraine-2013_ukr.pdf
6. Cf. "Der lange Marsch zur Modernisierung: Gewerkschaften in der Ukraine," Dec. 2013. library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/10438.pdf
7. Lyubomyr Shavalyuk, "Systematic Recession: Why Ukraine's economy and public finance are in a much worse state today compared to 2012," *Ukrainian Week*, July 5, 2013, ukrainianweek.com/Economics/83827.
8. "Mass protests by Ukrainian entrepreneurs against a new tax law," Nov. 17, 2010, www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2010-11-17/mass-protests-ukrainian-entrepreneurs-against-a-new-tax-law.
9. Nick Evans, "Ukraine, Russia and the miners of the Donbass," *Revolutionary Socialism* 21, April 16, 2014, rs21.org.uk/2014/04/16/ukraine-russia-and-the-miners-of-the-donbass/.

NewPolitics

Issue #57 • Summer 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editors

Letters by *Bennett Muraskin and Wayne Price*

THE AMERICAN SCENE

DAN LA BOTZ, *The Working Class and Left Politics: Back on the American Radar*

A. W. GAFFNEY, *Universalism and Health Care in the Twenty-First Century*

LOIS WEINER, *The Teachers' Trifecta: Democracy, Social Justice, Mobilization*

NAOMI WEISSTEIN, *The Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, 1970-1973: A Memoir and Reflection on Badass Boffo Revolutionary Feminist Music*

MARTHA W. REES, *Aquí Estamos Y No Nos Vamos. Adelina Nicholls on the Fight for Immigrant Rights*

DAVE FINKEL, *Droning On, Fracking the Planet: Foreign Policy in the Obama Era*

THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE

JOANNE LANDY, *Ukraine Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

KEVIN B. ANDERSON, *Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Interimperialist Rivalry*

SEAN LARSON, *Contradictions of the Ruling Class in Ukraine*

ARTICLES

JAMES KILGORE, *On Returning to Where the Heart Is*

NIALL REDDY, *Argentina: The End of Kirchnerism?*

MICHAEL PRÖBSTING, *China's Emergence as an Imperialist Power*

INGO SCHMIDT, *Rosa Luxemburg: Economics for a New Socialist Project*

TOM HARRISON, DAN LA BOTZ, and the EDITORS, *Remembering Doug Ireland, Steve Kindred, and James D. Young*

BOOK REVIEWS

MICHAEL J. THOMPSON, *on Thomas Piketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

MARTIN OPPENHEIMER, *on David Cunningham, Klansville, U.S.A.: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*

MICHAEL HIRSCH, *on Dean Starkman, The Watchdog That Didn't Bark: The Financial Crisis and the Disappearance of Investigative Journalism; and Matt Taibbi, The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*

E. HABERKERN, *on Matthew Hild, Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South*

KENT WORCESTER, *on Christian Høgsbjerg, C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain; Christian Høgsbjerg, Chris Braithwaite: Mariner, Renegade and Castaway; and C.L.R. James, Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History*

WORDS AND PICTURES

KENT WORCESTER, *In Memoriam: Phil Evans, 1946-2014*

NewPolitics

Why We Publish

New Politics is an independent socialist forum for dialogue and debate on the left. We support unions and workers' struggles throughout the world. We are committed to the advancement of the peace and anti-intervention movements. We stand in opposition to all forms of imperialism and oppression, and we are uncompromising in our defense of the rights of women, people of color, lesbians, gays and the transgendered. In our pages there is broad coverage of labor, social movements, and the international scene, as well as emphasis on cultural and intellectual history. Above all, *New Politics* insists on the centrality of democracy to socialism and on the need to rely on mass movements from below for progressive social transformation.

These are critical times. Not since before the New Deal have working people in this country been so vulnerable, and perhaps never before have big business and the right been so aggressive and dominant. Abroad, U.S. military and corporate power embraces the world in a stranglehold.

There are hopeful signs: resistance to austerity policies in Greece and France, strikes in China and South Africa, a violently-repressed but still living movement for democracy in Iran, new progressive social movements and socialist political parties in Latin America, heightened global outrage at the repression and intransigence of the Israeli state.

And here in the U.S., there have been some encouraging developments: a vibrant immigrant rights movement, growing opposition to the war in Afghanistan, grassroots demands for jobs and a real stimulus program, the beginnings of a backlash against Tea Party fanaticism. Yet the left remains too organizationally and intellectually weak to seriously challenge the Establishment.

New Politics seeks to revitalize the left as a step towards the creation of an international movement to replace capitalism, as well as non-capitalist exploitative systems, with socialism. *NP* is not attached or subordinated to any political party or institution. We stand for popular empowerment and democratic control at every level, opposition to all forms of authoritarianism, no matter how "leftist" their rhetoric — in short, a politics of socialism from below.

During the Cold War, *NP* was a beacon of principled socialist clarity. It tirelessly exposed the lie that identified the socialist legacy with Communist states. *NP* championed the struggles of the 60s and 70s movements against the Vietnam War and U.S. intervention in Central America, for women's and black liberation, for union democracy and affirmative action. We enthusiastically supported struggles for

democracy in the Soviet bloc. We have firmly defended the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to self-determination and security.

Since the Cold War, we have spoken out against the ravages inflicted by neoliberalism in this country and throughout the world, and we have exposed U.S. imperial aggression in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Haiti and elsewhere.

NP has been inspired throughout by the vision of a "third camp." During the Cold War it meant "Neither Washington nor Moscow"; today it means opposing Washington's imperial aggression while making no apologies for its antagonists when they are anti-democratic, be they Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, Ahmadinejad, or authoritarian religious fundamentalists.

Today, surveying the bleak political landscape, especially in the U.S., some argue that the left should trim its sails and be modest in its ambitions. We dare not do this. Not caution, but bold and imaginative radicalism is needed.

The aim of *NP* is to provide a voice to help transform popular struggles for equality, peace, social justice and freedom of cultural expression into a conscious, intelligent movement for a democratic, just and peaceful world.

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

- Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of
 \$50 \$100 \$250 other \$.....
- Enclosed is \$24 for a four-issue subscription to *New Politics*
(add \$16 for all foreign subscriptions including Canada)
- Supporting Subscription \$35

Please make checks payable to *New Politics* in U.S. currency only.

Please charge my credit card in the amount of \$

VISA OR MASTERCARD #

EXP. DATE SIGNATURE

NAME

ADDRESS.....

CITY STATE ZIP

E-MAIL

Please include your email so we can notify you when your subscription lapses.

New Politics

155 W. 72nd Street, Rm. 402, New York, NY 10023, USA