



THE UKRAINIAN LEFT DURING AND AFTER THE MAIDAN PROTESTS

Study requested by the DIE LINKE. delegation in the
GUE/NGL

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ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to present a balanced, well documented and nuanced discussion covering the full range of positions of the Ukrainian left and activities in relation to the Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements and the war. It covers all the major groups and parties who at least identify with the socialist and/or anarchist tradition: from 'old left' parties originating from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to 'new left' organisations, unions and informal initiatives that did not have any relation whatsoever to the CPSU. The paper gives a brief overview of the most important (and often still unresolved) questions about major political events in Ukraine starting from 2013. Then it describes and explains the positions and political activities of the various Ukrainian organisations on the left towards the Maidan uprising, the Anti-Maidan movement and the war in eastern Ukraine. The paper attempts to answer the following questions. How did different left wing organisations try to intervene in the Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements and how successful were their interventions? To what extent were they able to defend the left agenda against liberals and (both Ukrainian and Russian) nationalists? To what extent did they rather follow the agenda of their political opponents? What were the differences not only between the different left wing organisations but also between groups in Kiev and in the provinces? What was the real scale of repression by the new government and by the far right against various left wing organisations? To what extent did the repression specifically against the left or rather against separatist forces challenge the state's integrity? What are the current prospects and opportunities for left wing politics now in Ukraine both in the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary spheres? Are there any prospects for a 'left turn' in the separatist republics? What political lessons should the European and the international left draw from the political events in the Ukraine and what were their results for the local left?

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	1
LIST OF ACRONYMS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
WHAT HAPPENED IN UKRAINE?	5
THE UKRAINIAN LEFT BEFORE MAIDAN	13
Old left: the Communists and minor political parties	13
New left organisations, unions, initiatives	17
Old left and new left in the Ukrainian protests before Maidan	21
THE UKRAINIAN LEFT WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE MAIDAN PROTESTS	27
The anti-Maidan left during the Maidan protests.....	27
Why did other left-wing groups join the Maidan protests?	32
How did the left take part in the Maidan protests?.....	35
Results and alternatives	38
ANTI-MAIDAN PROTESTS	41
Pro-Maidan left and Anti-Maidan.....	42
Why did the left support Anti-Maidan?	48
How did the left take part in the Anti-Maidan protests?	54
Results and alternatives	62
THE UKRAINIAN LEFT AND THE WAR	63
Anti-war positions and activities	63
Left choosing sides	69
Ukrainian left-wing combatants in the war	76
CURRENT PROSPECTS OF THE UKRAINIAN LEFT	83
CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LEFT	93
REFERENCES	97

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AR – Autonomous Resistance
ATO – Anti-Terrorist Operation
AWU – Autonomous Workers Union
CFTU – Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine
CPDPR – Communist Party of Donetsk People’s Republic
CPRF – Communist Party of Russian Federation
CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPU – Communist Party of Ukraine
CSLR – Centre for Social and Labour Research
CSR – Centre for Society Research
DPR – Donetsk People’s Republic
KMA – National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy
LO – Left Opposition
LPR – Lugansk People’s Republic
OM – Organisation of Marxists
PSPU – Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine
RCAS – Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcha-Syndicalists
SPU – Socialist Party of Ukraine
ULP – United Left and Peasants
UPCD – Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data
VCD – Volunteer Communist Detachment in Prizrak brigade
VCRC – Visual Culture Research Centre
VIF – Left International Forum foundation

INTRODUCTION

Ukraine's Maidan protests, the Anti-Maidan counter-mobilisation and the subsequent civil war in eastern Ukraine posed very difficult questions for both the Ukrainian and international left wing movement. As with other major mobilisations in eastern Europe (in Russia in 2011-12, Romania in 2012 and Bulgaria in 2013) in recent times and previously in some Middle East countries during the 'Arab spring', left wing forces were not able to gain political hegemony as a result of the mass mobilisations. At the same time, even when successful, these mobilisations were sometimes able to remove incumbent governments but only to replace them with traditional opposition elites that were as distant from the masses as the governments that they had overthrown. Some observers have made naïve attempts to put the Ukrainian Maidan protests into the same category as the Occupy, Indignados or popular anti-austerity movements based on superficial similarities in the protest tactics of occupying major city squares. However, the differences in ideology, social base and political representation between the Maidan protests and the other movements are also striking. The Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements were both highly complex phenomena where there was no clear position that the left could obviously sympathise with by aligning with this or that competing nationalism or rival imperialist power. To various extents both movements combined progressive and reactionary elements that in both cases in the end appeared to be dominant.

It was therefore no surprise that the left's positions towards these events and attempts at active intervention or criticism were complicated and ambiguous although they were also highly charged and impassioned due to the intensity and violence of the events. Deep splits in the Ukrainian left in relation to Maidan and the civil war exacerbated this problem. Both the pro-Maidan and anti-Maidan part of the Ukrainian left were actively promoting very contradictory messages for the international left and making serious accusations against each other. At the same time, repression against at least some parts of the Ukrainian left (the Communist Party of Ukraine and the 'Borotba' organisation) created a pressing need for the international left to decide whether and how to support them, which led to highly emotional discussions.

This paper seeks to present a balanced, well documented and nuanced discussion covering the full range of positions of the Ukrainian left and activities in relation to the Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements and the war. It will use a very broad definition of the left, including all the major groups and parties who at least identify with the socialist and/or anarchist tradition: from 'old left' parties originating from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to 'new left' organisations, unions and informal initiatives that did not have any relation whatsoever to the CPSU. This spectrum is so wide that the extremes of it in either direction could perceive each other as not being part of the same movement at all, especially after the events in

Maidan. However, it does not yet mean that everyone, including their right wing enemies, will take such a nuanced approach.

The paper starts with a brief overview of the most important (and often still unresolved) questions about major political events in Ukraine starting from 2013. This is important as a benchmark for leftist positions. Then I seek to answer the following questions. What were the positions of the various Ukrainian organisations on the left towards the Maidan uprising, the Anti-Maidan movement and the war in eastern Ukraine and why precisely did they take them? How did different left wing organisations try to intervene in the Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements and how successful were their interventions? To what extent were they able to defend the left agenda against liberals and (both Ukrainian and Russian) nationalists? To what extent did they rather follow the agenda of their political opponents? What were the differences not only between the different left wing organisations but also between groups in Kiev and in the provinces? The political circumstances in the Kiev movement and to the east or to the west of the country were quite different, which could possibly have allowed more room for a more successful left wing organisation to intervene in some cities. What was the real scale of repression by the new government and by the far right against various left wing organisations? To what extent did the repression specifically against the left or rather against separatist forces challenge the state's integrity? What are the current prospects and opportunities for left wing politics now in Ukraine both in the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary spheres? Are there any prospects for a 'left turn' in the separatist republics? What political lessons should the European and the international left draw from the political events in the Ukraine and what were their results for the local left?

The sources for this research are documents, articles and statements from left wing publications and social networks public accounts; video records from the events; discussions in mailing lists and social networks; systematic protest and repression event data collected by the Centre for Social and Labour Research (CSLR) as part of the of the Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data (UPCD) project. Leftist intellectual *Commons: journal of social criticism* issue on left perspectives on Maidan published in early 2015 (in Ukrainian) provided especially valuable sources for this analysis.

WHAT HAPPENED IN UKRAINE?

There is no room here to present a comprehensive analysis of the highly complex events leading up to and following the Maidan protests. However, some points must be taken in order to provide a basic benchmark to assess the various left wing positions and actions during the events. It is even more important as the events were highly misrepresented by the media of conflicting parties (Ukrainian, Russian and Western parties) and became important elements in the information war waged together with the real war in 2014 and 2015.

The Maidan protests were provoked by the U-turn by Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich when he decided to suspend the EU's association agreement with Ukraine, which included an agreement on a deep and comprehensive free trade zone. It would be safe to say that many protesters did not have a realistic assessment of a free trade zone and its consequences for the Ukrainian economy. As a leftist economist, Oleksandr Kravchuk concludes:

Ukraine is not ready for the full liberalisation of the internal market for EU goods because the majority of Ukrainian industries are not competitive in comparison to European ones. It threatens to reduce the production and export of Ukrainian goods, with a corresponding closure of enterprises, especially in the long term. [1]

It was particularly dangerous because the most advanced Ukrainian industries worked for Russian and former Soviet countries. A free trade zone with the EU would probably lead to the de-industrialisation of Ukraine unless it was combined with big investments from western corporations, who would obviously be interested in political security and control in return for their investments. All this would be combined with an economic shock for the majority of Ukrainians, especially for the highly urbanised and industrialised eastern regions. The Prime Minister, Mykola Azarov, justified the suspension by referring to concerns about the consequences in terms of austerity of the IMF credit requirements accompanying the one billion euro credit, which would not be enough to cover the economic consequences of the losses in Russian market. At the same time, Russia was deliberately trying to prevent Ukraine from integrating with Europe by defending its economic, political and military interests, which could easily be perceived through the lens of Russia's oppression of Ukrainians in the past. As a result, right from the very start, the Maidan protests were fuelled not only by European illusions and hopes for a fundamental improvement in the Ukrainian state, economy and society but also by anti-Russian nationalism.

However, there were also other causes. The level of support for Yanukovich at the end of 2013 was not strong and the polls projected that he would definitely lose to any opposition candidate in the presidential elections scheduled for February 2015 except for the leader of the far right Svoboda party Oleh Tiahnybok. CSLR systematic protest events data showed that the number of social-economic protests was on the rise in Ukraine, beating the previous year's record. Yanukovich's slogan about 'living improvement already now' (*pokrashchennia*) combined with his ostensibly luxury lifestyle and corruption became a subject of widespread sarcastic comments by the population. Yanukovich had particularly weak support in the western and central regions, where the majority of people voted for his opponents in the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections. Many on the left usually perceived this regional political split as something detrimental to developing class consciousness and moving the attention of the oppressed from economic exploitation to cultural wars around history, memory, religion, geopolitical choice, identity etc. However, at the same time

it allowed for the quick politicisation of even local or group-specific socio-economic grievances when, in roughly half of the country, the president and the government had very little support by default¹. At the same time dissatisfaction from at least part of Ukrainian big business (the 'oligarchs') with an increasing monopolisation of power by the Yanukovich group (referred to as 'the Family') were definitely an important factor of support for Maidan, especially from the opposition parties. In 2010 Yanukovich reversed the political compromise after the Orange revolution of 2004, which established the parliamentary-presidential republic and re-installed the constitution of 1996, giving more powers to the president. Later he followed this up with selective persecution of the opposition leaders, including Yulia Tymoshenko. The US and EU elites openly supported the Maidan protests and indeed financed 'democracy promotion' in Ukraine for many years. However, its scale and consequences should not be exaggerated. They were rather exploited in the EU's and US's interests than directly manipulated from abroad.

Maidan was definitely not the peaceful protest as it was for a long time described in the sympathetic western press. It escalated to levels of violence that are unprecedented in contemporary Ukrainian history. However, the major turning points in terms of the radicalisation of the protest were clearly responses to police violence and governmental repression. The brutal dispersal of the first Maidan camp turned the protest into rebellion together with occupations of governmental buildings. The package of laws passed on 16 January 2014 by the pro-government majority that broke parliamentary procedures, but which did not impose a dictatorial regime as Maidan supporters claimed, nevertheless, systematically limited freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of speech, thereby impeding future political activity by any opposition movement. It provoked a new phase of Maidan's radicalization, involving mass street violence in Kiev's city centre. The government side also systematically used paid thugs (so called *titushki*) to intimidate, abduct and beat the Maidan protesters. However, many cases of violence during the Maidan events are still unresolved. There is evidence that at least in some cases elements of the opposition might have strategically staged abductions previously ascribed to government agents [2]. At the time of writing, the most systematic study of the 'snipers' massacre' on 20 February is the one by the University of Ottawa researcher Ivan Katchanovski [3]. He concludes that at least some of the Maidan protesters might have been killed in the false flag operation by elements of the opposition camp to provoke further escalation of violence and prevent a compromise with Yanukovich. In the same time the official Ukrainian investigation of the events is often perceived as unsatisfactory and was heavily criticised by the International Advisory Panel of the Council of Europe [4].

¹ As in the case of national protests against tax increases for the self-employed and petty entrepreneurs in 2010 or a year later the even more specific protests of Chernobyl liquidators or Soviet Afghanistan war veterans against cancelling the state guarantee for their increased pensions.

Maidan was obviously not just a phenomenon in Kiev however. At the same time it was not a fully national rebellion uniting all the people against the government. According to CSLR, only 13% of Maidan protests took place in Kiev while two thirds of the Maidan protests took place in other western and central Ukrainian regions [5]. There were indeed pro-Maidan protests in southern and eastern Ukrainian regions as well but they were much smaller in size, mobilising only radical minorities and they were unable to win majority support in their localities.

There were different reasons for the lack of support for the Maidan cause in the southern and eastern regions. Some of them due to material interests such as that a free trade zone with the EU could put the jobs in eastern Ukrainian industries working for the Russian market at risk. Some of them were of a cultural nature, coinciding with the weakness of Ukrainian national identity, language, historical, church and other cleavages in Ukraine. One reason was, however, an active and very visible participation in Maidan by the far right Ukrainian radical nationalists primarily from the Svoboda ('freedom' in Ukrainian) party and the Right Sector. Their role was heavily exaggerated by Russian media and Anti-Maidan forces. However, systematic protest events' data shows that they were indeed the most active and visible collective agents in the Maidan protests, particularly in violent events [6]. The liberal wing of Maidan did not make any serious effort to break with the far right, mostly trying to downplay and silence their participation for strategic reasons.

In sum, Maidan combined just social grievances against the corrupt Yanukovich rule together with European illusions and anti-Russian nationalism. Economic and historical factors determined a significant regional unevenness of support for Maidan. However, the protest violence and strong far right presence also precluded Maidan from becoming a truly fully national revolt against the government. It only made it easier to instrumentalise Maidan in the struggle between competing blocks of Ukrainian political and business elites as well as in competition between EU, US and Russian economic and political interests.

On 18 February 2014, mass violence between Maidan protesters and law enforcement in Kiev broke out again after a short truce, resulting, a few days later, in Yanukovich fleeing from Kiev and a change of government. There were many controversies and debates, in particular about the process of changing the government and the nature of the new government.

Was it an 'illegitimate coup d'état'? Yanukovich's authority had already been effectively dismantled in western regions in the evening of 18 February when protesters in many cities attacked law enforcement offices and military zones, capturing arms, some of which were used in Kiev in the following days. The parliament's decision to depose Yanukovich was definitely in breach of the Constitution. At the same time, the opposition leaders were obviously hesitant to take power and were trying to negotiate with Yanukovich, accepting the deal signed on 21 February with the support of European foreign ministers which would leave

Yanukovich as president until December 2014. The protest crowd was more radical than the opposition leaders, demanding Yanukovich's immediate resignation. Even if Katchanovski's hypothesis is confirmed, it does not reject the reality of the mass uprising which was only exploited by some forces interested in violent change of power.

What was the nature of the post-Maidan government? Was it a 'fascist junta' as it was often called by Russian propaganda, but also by many leftists joining the Anti-Maidan movement? Members of the far-right Svoboda party took up several positions in the new government, including as one of the deputy prime ministers and the prosecutor-general. Several more top officials in the post-Maidan government, including the national security and defence secretary and the minister of education, had a far-right political background. However, whether they were really able to impose their ideology on the government was quite questionable. In the presidential (May 2014) and parliamentary (October 2014) elections, the far-right candidates and parties got low results and did not get into the next session of the parliament or into the new government formed in December 2014. It was not a fascist government, something which was later recognised even by some separatist leaders [7].

This should not lead us to conclude that the whole issue of the far-right threat during and after Maidan was invented by the hostile Russian media. The far right definitely increased their influence and resources, gaining arms, forming military groups, getting positions in law enforcement, meeting with a mixture of tolerance, a lack of awareness of the danger they posed, and attempts by the authorities to integrate far-right volunteers into the regular army and police structures. Moreover, as the war in Donbass proceeded, the whole political mainstream in Ukraine was moving to the right, becoming if not fascist then certainly strongly nationalist and intolerant of anything that might be connected to the separatist cause. According to the CSLR protest and repression data, the level of state repression of protests in August-December 2014 and April-June 2015 was even higher than during the Yanukovich regime; moreover, repression increased, not only against pro-separatist and political protests but even against non-politicised socio-economic protests as well [8]. The post-Maidan Ukrainian government united neoliberals and nationalists, combining neoliberal reforms and austerity, anti-communism and Ukrainian nationalist cultural politics and political repression against the opposition.

Anti-Maidan, which during the Maidan protests was mainly organised in a top-down manner by the Party of Regions to simulate mass support for Yanukovich and also to intimidate Maidan protesters, suddenly acquired a powerful grassroots dynamic in regions in south-eastern Ukraine in late February. It was indeed a mass movement involving thousands of protesters. They usually demanded referenda to be held on the self-determination of Ukrainian regions, sometimes implying the federalisation of Ukraine, sometimes implying breaking away from Ukraine and establishing independent states or joining Russia, following the Crimean scenario. Protesters were

motivated by fears of the threat of the far right and discrimination against the Russian language, and by an aversion to Ukrainian nationalism that they feared would be imposed on the predominantly Russian-speaking south-eastern provinces. These fears were aggravated by hysterical propaganda in Russian mass media. However, as with Maidan, behind somewhat irrational fears lay completely rational social grievances [9]: the consequences of the European association agreement that would be harmful for Russian-market oriented heavy industry in Eastern regions, disappointment in the Ukrainian state for allowing industry and infrastructure to degrade for more than 20 years without investments in development, hopes for higher wages and pensions in Russia, etc. However, it is imprudent to say that Anti-Maidan had a more 'proletarian' social base, which some of its leftist supporters ascribed to it, or on the contrary that it was a hodgepodge of Russian agents, 'lumpens', criminals and former law enforcement, as opponents preferred to think. In fact there is even less systematic evidence of the social profile of participants in the Anti-Maidan movement than there is of Maidan supporters². The political structure of Anti-Maidan was different. At least in the beginning, in late February and March 2014, it was more decentralised and lacked any strong political force or control, allowing weak Russian nationalist and left organisations to play a more important role in the protests than they were allowed to in the case of Maidan.

On 6 April, Anti-Maidan protesters started their uprising, occupying state buildings in Donetsk, Lugansk and Kharkov and proclaiming sovereign 'people's republics'. In Kharkov, the separatist initiative was short-lived and was precluded in the next few days. In Donetsk and Lugansk, law enforcement, disoriented after Maidan, was unable to respond effectively; instead, some members were starting to join the separatist militia. On 12 April 2014, the armed insurrection started, initiated in the town of Slavyansk in Donetsk province by an armed group under Igor Strelkov (Girkin), a former Russian security service officer and monarchist activist. He was followed by a number of other Russian volunteers – often driven by a nationalist idea of the 'Russian world' uniting all Russian-speaking populations around the Russian state, sometimes with monarchist (the resurrection of the Russian Empire) and far-right interpretations – who, during the early stages, played leading roles in the emerging Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics. This all raised questions about whether the 'civil war' concept is applicable to the military conflict in Ukraine and whether it is not just Russian propaganda to cover Russian military intervention. The annexation of Crimea was definitely a Russian special operation, acknowledged as such by Putin in a recent propaganda movie *Crimea. Way back home* [10], though even it involved grassroots mobilisation among Crimean Russians organised in self-defence militia against Ukrainian nationalists [9, pp. 59-62]. At the same time, the annexation of Crimea provided a rallying point, an aspiration and a scenario to separatists in other regions. It would be impossible for Strelkov's armed group to cross the Russian border without at least the knowledge of the Russian government, even if it was not being directly

² For the survey results conducted among participants of the Kiev Maidan camp and rallies see [299].

orchestrated by the Russian special forces. Later, Russia supported the rebels with weapons and money that also came from Russian nationalist private initiatives. When Ukrainian forces were threatening to rout the separatist militia in the middle of August, it is widely recognised (by pro-separatist sources, too) that regular units of the Russian army intervened directly and helped to defeat the Ukrainian forces [11, pp. 242-247].

The question about civil war is even more pertinent as the military conflict was not strongly aligned along ethnic and language faultlines in Ukraine: Russian-speakers have been fighting *en masse* on both sides of the front line. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has not so far provoked anything approaching ethnic cleansing or genocidal actions. The tragedy on 2 May in Odessa, where more than 40 Anti-Maidan activists died when the Trade Union House was set on fire by pro-Ukrainian activists, became mythologised in separatist propaganda as the 'Odessa Khatyn'³. The International Advisory Panel of the Council of Europe strongly criticized Ukrainian official investigation of the events for its suspiciously slow pace, unequal treatment of pro-Ukrainian and Anti-Maidan activists, ignoring shooting by pro-Ukrainian side and falsifying evidence by the head of Odessa police [12]. Some people in Ukrainian government, including the top police officials, might have planned to use far right activists, football ultras and Maidan Self-Defence militia to suppress separatist movement in Odessa and did not interfere when pro-Ukrainian militants attacked the Trade Union House with Molotov cocktails. However, the scale of the deaths was more an unintended consequence of non-interrupted armed clashes between pro-Ukrainian and Anti-Maidan supporters than it was part of a conscious plan to commit mass murder.

Nevertheless, there were economic and cultural grievances in south-eastern Ukraine, interests of the local elites combined with a lack of legitimacy of the new Ukrainian government, disorientation and sometimes sabotage of the law-enforcement in those regions for almost two months [13] that might have produced a separatist insurrection even without support from the Russian government. However, it would hardly be able to resist the Ukrainian army for such a long time without Russian support. At the same time, the Ukrainian government has received Western support in the form of non-lethal and lethal weapons from NATO countries, military training, and loans from international financial institutions.

What is emerging after the relative stabilisation of the frontline and the centralisation of power in Donetsk and Lugansk following agreements in Minsk in September 2014 and February 2015 are two client states: one in the main part of Ukraine controlled by the government in Kiev, and the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR) controlling lesser areas of Donetsk and Lugansk provinces and several million residents, with a high proportion of older people who had less opportunity to leave their homes for Ukraine or Russia. There are many important differences between

³ Khatyn was a village in Belarus burned down with all its residents by the Nazis in 1943.

Ukraine and the DPR/LPR but they are often quantitative, not qualitative. Both are economically dependent on either US, EU and international financial institutions (Ukraine) or Russia (DPR/LPR), though the level of economic sustainability is obviously greater in Ukraine. Both parts coordinate crucial changes in the government with their foreign patrons, though Russia's control over DPR/LPR authorities is significantly tighter, making them not merely client but puppet states. Both regimes use political repression and censorship and limit civic rights, though opportunities for opposition politics in Ukraine still exist, while any opposition public politics in the DPR/LPR is effectively non-existent. Both Ukraine and the DPR/LPR promote nationalist cultural politics (in Donbass, it is based on the new 'Novorossiya'⁴ identity and the concept of the 'Russian world'); although in Ukraine overtly conservative and reactionary initiatives are somewhat better controlled by liberal civil society that appeals to 'European values'.

Whatever the original plans and aspirations of the different parties to the conflict, the result is that Ukraine is an impoverished country with minimal wage rate at the level of sub-Saharan Africa, with a highly educated population that will be desperate for jobs once Soviet old industry has been outcompeted in the free-trade zone with the EU, and with a servile government dependent on Western support. If two conditions are met – 1) the military conflict is stopped or at least essentially frozen, and 2) transparent rules of doing business are imposed on Ukrainian oligarchs, deprived of selective preferences from the state – Ukraine would be a good new country for investment opportunities for global capital. Meanwhile, the military and economic interests of the Russian state and Russian business aspire to, as they believe, their rightful place in a 'multipolar' world divided between the great powers into spheres of influence, a world in which smaller nations will not have a voice to decide their fate. Besides the conflict of rival imperialisms, this is a clash of competing and mutually-reinforcing Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms. Both sides of the war exploit the rhetoric of national liberation. For Ukrainian nationalists, this is a struggle against their historical oppressor who rejects the sovereignty of the Ukrainian nation. For the opposing side, this is a struggle to defend the Russian-speaking population from the perceived discrimination and even 'genocidal' threat from Ukrainian 'fascists'. However, in Ukraine there is no clear oppressor nation and oppressed nation. If the Ukrainian language dominated the state sphere, then in the market, Russian-language cultural products were predominant. And there were also social grievances that were common to people in western and eastern Ukraine: solving the problem of corruption permeating the whole of society, unemployment, low living standards, and deteriorating infrastructure and educational and healthcare institutions. The Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements channelled social grievances into a confrontation between competing Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms exploited by rival imperialist

⁴ Novorossiya is a historical name for the territories to the north of the Black Sea in the Russian Empire. In pro-Russian separatist movement Novorossiya became an important geographical imaginary denoting separatist-controlled areas and legitimating claims for secession from Ukraine of all its southern and eastern provinces (so called 'Greater Novorossiya'). Though only a minority of local population expressed support for Novorossiyan identity [300].

blocs. Precisely at the moment when a progressive social agenda was more necessary than ever before for the unity of the country, there was no powerful political force to articulate it clearly in opposition to both nationalist and imperialist camps and to unite progressive elements in both movements. This paper attempts to explain why this happened.

THE UKRAINIAN LEFT BEFORE MAIDAN

In a comparative context, the Ukrainian left movement was (and still is ever more) weak. However, as in many other countries it is very diverse in its origins, organisation structure, ideologies and strategies. This chapter does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of post-Soviet Ukrainian left history but will serve as a necessary way to map the movement up until late 2013 when the Maidan protests started. It is worth discussing the Ukrainian left as two main types: 1) the 'old left' political parties in almost all cases originating from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or its post-Soviet successors; 2) the 'new left' political organisations and initiatives, leftist politicised unions, intellectual and cultural initiatives which did not have or had clearly broken connections to the CPSU-successor parties and are always very critical towards them. I will end the chapter with a systematic analysis of the old and new left participation in Ukrainian protest events before Maidan, completing the mapping of Ukrainian left.

OLD LEFT: THE COMMUNISTS AND MINOR POLITICAL PARTIES

By the late 2013 **the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU)** (<http://www.kpu.ua/>) remained the only at least declaratively left party in the parliament. The CPU was reestablished in 1993 after being banned in September 1991 following the failed attempt at a coup-d'état in the USSR in August 1991. Before 2002 the CPU was the most popular party in the country and was, at the peak of its support, able to win 24.7% of the vote in the 1998 parliamentary elections for its party list and 39 MPs winning elections in single-member districts, thus giving the Communist parliamentary group 123 MPs overall or 27.3% of the seats⁵. In 1999, the Communist leader Petro Symonenko secured 37.8% of the vote in the second round of the presidential elections [14, pp. 11-12].

In the 1990s and even later the CPU played an important role in blocking at least some neoliberal legislation in the parliament. The former CPU-affiliated organization called the All-Ukrainian Union of Workers concentrated the most radical wing of the party and attempted to link the party to labour struggles. However, the end of the strong 1990s electoral results created an illusion that electoral victory and arriving in power in a parliamentary way was possible. The party was increasingly prioritising

⁵ The Ukrainian election system has changed several times during its history. In 1998 (and now) the Ukrainian parliamentary elections were organised according to a "mixed" system when a half of the 450 seats in the parliament were elected on a proportional basis and another half was elected in territorial single-member districts.

parliamentary politics over extra-parliamentary mobilisations. The parliamentary group concentrated the overwhelming influence within the party while increasingly becoming a normal part of the bourgeois elite both via corruption of the party leaders and by selling top places in the party electoral list to business people for their financial support in electoral campaigns. Since 1993 and up to this moment Petro Symonenko has been the permanent leader of the CPU despite constant talks in the party about the need to rejuvenate the leadership.

In 2002 the CPU lost, for the first time, first place in the elections to the national-democratic bloc of the future President, Viktor Yushchenko, Our Ukraine, winning only 14% of the seats in the parliament. In the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections the CPU won only 3.6% and 5.4% of the vote in the proportional voting system while support for the Communist leader Petro Symonenko went down to 5% in 2005 and 3.5% in the 2010 presidential elections. It is noteworthy that the majority of the former Communist electorate switched to the Party of Regions [14, p. 22] – a political representation of several oligarchic groups and later the parliamentary backbone of President Viktor Yanukovich.

Why did it happen? The academic discussions about the Ukrainian and wider post-socialist eastern European left were pre-dominantly focused on the question of whether the Communist-successor parties were reforming themselves into right-wing social-democrats (like Polish, Romanian or Bulgarian former ruling parties did) or whether they were remaining orthodox Marxist-Leninists [15, p. 256]. It was obvious that there was the third way of national-patriotic evolution transforming loyalty to the Soviet experience into a conservative project. Social conservatism in the post-Soviet situation means reactive defending of the remnants of Soviet social security against neoliberal reforms while being unable to propose and lead a pro-active struggle for socialist transformation. However, it often went together with cultural conservatism in gender relations, sexuality and attempts at reconciliation with the Eastern Orthodox Church (of the Moscow not Kiev patriarchate, which is important), while Soviet patriotism evolved into nostalgia for a strong state and Russian nationalism up to aligning with the politics of Putin's contemporary Russia. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation went the furthest this way but the Ukrainian Communist party went in that way as well, although to a lesser extent. However, in regionally split Ukraine, such a position means clearly aligning the party with the eastern Ukrainian electorate involving themselves in national, language, historical and even church cultural wars [16, pp. 35-36] at the expense of a consistent position on social-economic issues. Even at the peak of their electoral support, the CPU electorate was concentrated in the eastern and southern Ukrainian regions. For example, in 1998 the CPU won 40% in eastern Ukrainian provinces, 34.1% in southern ones, 23.4% in the centre and only 9.3% in the west [14, p. 20]. The same regional pattern skewed to southern and eastern provinces remained in the further elections where the Party of Regions created its stronghold based on patronage networks and media resources. Instead of opposing the Party of Regions the CPU got objectively

aligned with it against the 'orange' oligarchic parties of Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko to such an extent as to formally join the governing coalitions with the Party of Regions as a minority partner in 2006 and 2010.

The last pre-Maidan parliamentary election results seemingly marked a downward trend for the CPU. The party won 13.2% in the proportional vote but won no single-member district MP. The electoral success was limited to south-eastern Ukrainian regions and was probably connected to dissatisfaction with the Viktor Yanukovich government's neoliberal measures. The CPU went for these elections with a stronger social-economic agenda than usual but failed to win much beyond the former Party of Regions' electorate. Despite the fact that no formal coalition was required under the then working Constitution, the CPU was again perceived as a part of the governing coalition, with the Party of Regions supporting them on a number of important votes.

Other left-wing parties had already been out of the parliament for years by the end of 2013. Among them, the **Socialist Party of Ukraine** (SPU) and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU) are the most important to mention. The SPU (<http://spu.in.ua>) was founded in 1991, absorbing members of the banned Communist Party of Ukraine and later losing many of them when the CPU was restored in 1993. The loss of the more orthodox Communist members at the same time gave the SPU a chance to reform. However, the SPU leadership was orienting towards the Socialist International parties rather than progressive radical left parties. In 2004, the SPU managed to become a consultative member of the Socialist International, losing this position in 2011. The SPU had never had a big parliamentary group. The highest support it obtained was 8.6% in 1998 (in a bloc with the Peasant Party of Ukraine) and 34 MPs. Unlike the CPU, which polled most in the eastern and southern regions, the SPU stronghold was in the rural areas of the central Ukrainian provinces. However, Oleksandr Moroz was able to be elected twice as the parliament's speaker, serving in 1994-98 and in 2006-2007. Moroz's personal rating was higher than the party's and he secured 13.1% and 11.3% of the vote in the presidential elections in 1994 and 1999, coming third both times. Unlike the Communists, the SPU consistently participated in opposition movements against President Leonid Kuchma together with the nationalists and liberals. In 2000-2001 the SPU was one of the initiators and the backbones of the opposition 'Ukraine without Kuchma' campaign and later supported the Orange revolution in 2004 against elections stolen by Viktor Yanukovich. However, after the parliamentary elections in 2006 when the SPU won 5.7% of the vote, it preferred a coalition with the Party of Regions and CPU against the expectations of its electorate. It appeared to be a disastrous move, kicking the SPU out of the parliament in the next elections in 2007 and effectively destroying the party base. In 2011, the SPU, on the one side, and some earlier splits from the party, on the other, initiated two separate unification left-of-centre projects but both of them failed miserably in the 2012 parliamentary elections. The SPU won only 0.5% for their party list, the United Left and Peasants formed from

the SPU earlier splinter parties was not able to form a party list at all, competed only in 24 single-member districts and won none.

The **Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine** (PSPU, <http://vitrenko.org/>) was a bright and populist phenomenon in the 1990s. It split in 1996 from the SPU on orthodox grounds, appealing to the true tradition of Lenin. Some commentators even mistakenly called it a 'Trotskyist' party. In the 1998 parliamentary elections it was able to enter the parliament with 4% for the party list and three MPs won in single-member districts. In 1999 the PSPU leader Natalia Vitrenko won 11% of the vote in the presidential elections, coming fourth behind Petro Symonenko (CPU) and Oleksandr Moroz (SPU). Ukrainian sociologist Valeriy Khmelko concluded that the PSPU electorate in the 1990s was 'left-of-centre' [17]. However, while the SPU was indeed showing some movement to the left-of-centre reformed social-democratic party, the PSPU went the other way, moving to a much more radical Russian nationalist and conservative position than the Communists. Natalia Vitrenko fully embraced the rhetoric of 'civilisational conflict', openly prioritizing the defence of 'Eastern Slavic Orthodox civilisation' against western imperialism and a pro-Russian geopolitical choice over class conflict. In the 2002 parliamentary elections the PSPU won 3.2% of the vote, which was not enough to enter parliament, later marginalising and decreasing their electoral support in the forthcoming elections even more. In the 2012 elections the PSPU was not even able to form a party list for the elections.

By the time the Maidan protests started in late 2013, the 'old left' political parties had already been stagnating in the crisis for years. Changing themselves in a social-democratic or Russian nationalist way, they were not able to gain political success. They discredited themselves via coalitions with oligarchic parties and integration with the political and economic elite. At the same time the critical currents were not able to revive these parties on socialist grounds, particularly because of the weakness of the anti-neoliberal grassroots mobilisation in Ukraine. A number of microscopic Stalinist orthodox parties⁶ that came mostly from the CPSU organisation and tradition were able only to criticise the CPU without any real audience. A review of the left parties prepared in 2013 summarised the internal problems of the 'old left':

Regardless of the ideological discourse they chose for external representation, the vices distinctive to the middle rank Soviet party nomenclature (and it is precisely in this milieu that major leaders of the above mentioned parties have their origins) are reflected in these parties. The domination of the leadership inside the parties; fear of self-organising methods and approaches; lack of work in the broad popular masses, above all, among youth; conservative traditionalist values and directions to some extent covered with pseudo-Marxist rhetoric and Soviet patriotic mental constructs; domination of the older generation (mostly retired) inside the parties are not even the full list of post-

⁶ Like the Ukrainian branch of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, the Communist Marxist-Leninist Party of Ukraine, the Communist Part of Workers and Peasants, the Union of Communists of Ukraine, Workers Party of Ukraine (Marxist-Leninist) [18, pp. 125-26].

Soviet Ukrainian left immanent features seriously hindering this segment of Ukrainian left politics to get its public representation in the wider popular masses and get at this stage into real 'big politics'. [18, pp. 132-133]

NEW LEFT ORGANISATIONS, UNIONS, INITIATIVES

Besides the 'old left' political parties, a 'new left' movement has been emerging in Ukraine, beginning with the anarchist groups in the late 1980 during the *perestroika* mobilisations. The new left organisations and groups did not have any organised connection to the CPSU or were clearly breaking from the CPSU-successor parties like the CPU. At least before the Maidan protests it was possible to speak about some shared identity for a diverse movement although this identity was quite shallow and negative in nature. The new left could be defined as being in opposition to the 'old left', which was criticised for bureaucratisation and deviations from socialist ideas and practices. Nevertheless, there was a continuum from young pro-Soviet Communists to social democratic left liberals regularly participating in the same political actions and having discussions together with each other at the same conferences. However, they shared only a simple understanding of the need for some new left forces and criticism of the old left, which was usually not regarded as part of the same left movement at all.

In any case this identity of the 'new left' or 'true left' in opposition to the 'not left at all' political parties covered a very diverse movement. It included political organisations, even proto-political parties, independent labour and student unions, informal networks, NGOs, intellectual and cultural initiatives. The overall number of new left activists all over Ukraine barely exceeded 1,000 people. There is no sense in describing all the new left initiatives as many of them were too fragile and could not survive even for a few years, leaving no significant mark on history. They are much less known to the Ukrainian public compared to the old left parties. However, they were important in certain protest campaigns, organising independent unions and intellectual activity. It will therefore still be useful to map the most important and successful initiatives as they existed before the Maidan protests started.

Among the political new left organisations, the most well known and controversial was the **Borotba Union** (meaning 'struggle' in Ukrainian, <http://borotba.su/>). It emerged from the split of the Organisation of Marxists (OM) – a major new left initiative in the late 2000s that aimed to unite all the revolutionary Marxists in Ukraine despite their attitudes towards the Soviet Union. The OM brought together the radical wing of CPU-affiliated organisations like the All-Ukrainian Union of Workers and *Komsomol*, which had left them after the CPU supported Yanukovich in the Orange revolution, Trotskyists leaving behind the practice of sectarian 'internationals' and some left wing communists. However, that initiative ultimately failed not only as it was unable to transcend the political differences between various trends in Marxism but also facilitating deep distrust between its former members. At the end of 2010 the OM initiated the creation of a 'left political subject', reacting to the dynamic

development and successes of the far right Svoboda party but provoking only the dynamics of a dirty split within the organisation. The post-CPU wing of the OM together with the Youth against Capitalism group that left the CPU youth organisation later formed the core of Borotba in 2011. The post-Trotskyist wing together with left-liberal intellectuals formed the Left Opposition organization. The left wing communists formed a small group called 'Against the Current'.

Borotba called itself a Marxist-Leninist organisation [19], although obviously it did not want to mimic the old left but rather start a modern progressive radical left political party. Borotba organised an antifascist campaign in 2012, attempting to gain attention in a confrontation with Svoboda. They also participated in a number of local social-economic campaigns, for example in support of employees of the bankrupted airline company Aerosvit. The most active groups aside from in Kiev were in Odessa and Kharkov. In 2012 two members of Borotba, Serhii Kyrychuk and Oleksii Albu (who was the CPU member of the Odessa regional council but left the party in 2011), balloted in the parliamentary elections in single-member districts, however, getting miserable results – 1.3% for Kyrychuk and 0.8% for Albu. Borotba members, including a well known leftist journalist called Andriy Manchuk, were the core of the editorial board for the Liva (meaning 'the left') web-magazine (<http://liva.com.ua>), one of the most popular Ukrainian left wing websites.

By the late 2013 Borotba had already provoked many controversies in the new left. It is important to stick to the major lines of criticism as they became the points of attack against Borotba during the Anti-Maidan protests and were purposefully circulated to the western public by sectarian anarchists [20, 21]. The primary reason was their party ambitions, which were rejected by anarchists and which particularly led to suspicions that Borotba was taking advantage of united left actions for self-promotion. In wide left wing coalitions this kind of accusation is very typical against party-like, 'vertical', 'authoritarian' organisations from more network-like, 'horizontal', 'libertarian' initiatives. Although some misunderstanding was quite possible and there was accidental evidence that at least some Borotba members were quite cynical about exploiting united left actions, the conflict between a party-oriented organisation interested in publicity and anarchist networks that were uninterested and simply incapable of strategic media-promotion was barely avoidable. Other typical attacks against Borotba accused it of Stalinism, which for the sectarian left often means just a defence of the Soviet Union in contrast to more critical approaches to the socialist elements in the USSR, notwithstanding a position on Stalin's policies and thoughts specifically. One of the Borotba leaders and ideologues, Viktor Shapinov, was known for his background in 'Stalinist' organisations but also for an article entitled 'There is no more Stalinism and Trotskyism, there is revolutionary Marxism and reformism'. He argued that, with the collapse of the USSR, the divisions in the left movement based on the different positions towards the Soviet Union are no longer politically relevant, thus trying not to defend but to transcend a Stalinist position [22]. It would be most correct to call Borotba not 'Stalinist' but rather 'tolerant to Stalinism'. Beyond

sectarian criticism, the thing that had real negative consequences was that the people coming from CPU or CPU-affiliated organisations sometimes brought with them residuals of old left political practices together with conservative attitudes – tolerated and even flourishing in the old left but intolerable by the new left. Borotba proclaimed that they stood for the principle of gender equality among others [23]. However, there was evidence of accidental sexist deeds and statements by its members [20]. The case most emphasised for discrediting Borotba abroad was about some of its leadership (later on holding the leading positions in Borotba) from the Left International Forum (VIF) foundation getting a grant of approximately \$30,000 for the existing Organization of Marxists without properly informing other members of the organisation. There was no evidence of corruption or personal appropriation of the grant money and the VIF auditors did not push the formal charges for improper use of the grant. However, the case showed a lack of internal democracy and transparency within the organisation. In combination with evidence of Viktor Shapinov's work for Putin's United Russia party campaign, it formed a reason for later suspicions (though without convincing evidence) that he or a narrow circle of the leadership may exploit Borotba in Russian-funded political projects.

Another major mobilising structure for the new left was the **Direct Action** (<http://direct-action.org.ua/>) student union. Ideological anarchists appealing to predecessor student union in the 1990s of the same name founded Direct Action in 2008. Direct Action was a legally registered union although in reality it worked as a grassroots student syndicalist organisation based on 'horizontal coordination principles', leaderlessness, aspiring for consensus decision-making and replacement of the bureaucratic administrative apparatus in education with student-lecturers' self-government. It criticised the commercialising and marketisation of education, stood for the social rights of the students, stood against authoritarian tendencies in education and stood for libertarian pedagogy. Although in any official descriptive texts about Direct Action it was never directly called 'a left-wing organisation', its analysis and criticism was substantively left-libertarian, at least frequently appealing to the 1960s and contemporary student protests in the EU and in the US, informing about cooperation with other overtly leftist (even by name) organisations, banning membership of the union for people with 'racist, Nazi, sexist views or believing in any other chauvinist doctrine' and also distancing itself from any political party, commercial enterprise or university administration. As for almost every other new left initiative, the strongest Direct Action activist group was based in Kiev but also had active cells in Kharkov, Khmelnytskyi and other Ukrainian cities. In some moments Direct Action was virtually the only force in the Ukrainian student movement. For example, in 2010 it led a mobilisation of over 10,000 students in 14 Ukrainian cities against the introduction of paid-for services in universities. However, the union did not focus exclusively on higher education problems. It participated in mobilisations in defence of labour interests, gender equality and civic rights serving as a network for mobilisation around broad left-liberal issues. By the end of 2013, Direct Action was in

obvious crisis, exhausted in cooperation with national liberals in higher education campaigns, tired from conflicts between sectarian left groups exploiting the union mobilization and failing to solve the problem of generation change when the former leaders were becoming older and more distanced from the students' problems.

Autonomous Workers' Union (AWU) (<http://avtonomia.net/> and the <http://nihilist.li> website close to them) hoped to be an 'adult' organisation for the former student activists although effectively had become rather an anarchist sect piggybacking on the success of Direct Action. The AWU aspired to be a revolutionary syndicalist initiative. However, in no enterprise was it able to recruit at least three people to register a union cell formally [24]. Overall, it was more successful in promoting a radical liberal agenda within the left than in labour struggles and in self-education than in mobilisation or organising. Aside from Kiev, another active AWU group was in Kharkov. The AWU was the primary instigator of the above-mentioned attacks on Borotba and against almost every other initiative from the new left.

The **Left Opposition** organisation (LO) (<http://gaslo.info>) was somehow in between post-CPU and the liberal new left. It emerged from the post-Trotskyist wing of the Organisation of Marxists but also invited young left-liberal intellectuals from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (KMA)⁷ to join it. The most active LO group besides Kiev was in Odessa. Among other new left activities, this initiative was probably the most successful in making connections with the biggest independent labour union confederation – the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (CFTU) – as it was at the same time sensitive to non-class issues. However, by late 2013 this attempt for a 'wide' or 'open' left initiative was rather stagnating and losing activists.

The **Defense of Labour** independent union (<http://tradeunion.org.ua>) did not openly position itself on the left. However, it did have new left origins and undoubtedly a leftist leadership. The union's leader is Oleh VERNYK, who used to be a Trotskyist activist since the 1990s. Defense of Labour mobilised supermarket employees, small market vendors, construction and port workers. Unlike other new left initiatives Defense of Labour activity was not so predominantly concentrated in Kiev with, perhaps, even stronger cells in Odessa, Lviv and Dnepropetrovsk. In 2013 the union closely cooperated with left wing nationalists from the **Autonomous Resistance** (<http://opir.info/>) movement (AR). This fact produced many controversies among the left as the AR had origins in the neo-Nazi movement. However, they were quite a mass phenomenon and, by 2013, they had indeed gone a long way to the left although perhaps retaining some residuals of their far right origins, particularly, some conservative attitudes in gender issues. The article entitled 'Our evolution and our tradition' by their leader Yevhen Herasymenko is an amazing piece of writing, arguing

⁷ Kyiv-Mohyla Academy is an elite university with an open pro-nationalist mission and origins. Paradoxically, it allowed several major new left intellectual and cultural initiatives like Visual Culture Research Centre (<http://vcrc.org.ua/en>), Commons: Journal of Social Criticism (<http://commons.com.ua>), the Centre for Society Research (<http://cedos.org.ua>) to develop – the last two were not institutionally connected to the KMA but had grown in the same milieu.

for a genuine anti-authoritarian form of socialism with quotations from Goebbels, Mussolini and Ukrainian integral nationalists along with Marxist, anarchist and Ukrainian socialist authors [25].

To complete the mapping of Ukrainian new left before Maidan it is worth mentioning **subcultural antifascists**, who are not very different from the western European analogues despite the fact that they are much weaker than neo-Nazis in Ukraine and the **Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (RCAS)**. RCAS used to be a relatively big organisation centred in Donetsk with a lot of experience of participation in mass miners' strikes. Unlike subcultural anarchists and the liberal left, it emphasised the need for disciplined organisation and was somewhat suspicious about postmodern left wing issues. In response it was criticised for authoritarianism and conservatism. In 2011-12 RCAS experienced a devastating split and was quite passive by the time Maidan started.

OLD LEFT AND NEW LEFT IN THE UKRAINIAN PROTESTS BEFORE MAIDAN

The Centre for Social and Labour Research Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data⁸ can help us depict the participation in the protests of the old and new left before the Maidan protests started. The following data cover the pre-Maidan period from 1 January 2011 until 20 November 2013. Some of the following comparisons of distributions with the Ukrainian far right will be very indicative in underlining the left's strengths and weaknesses.

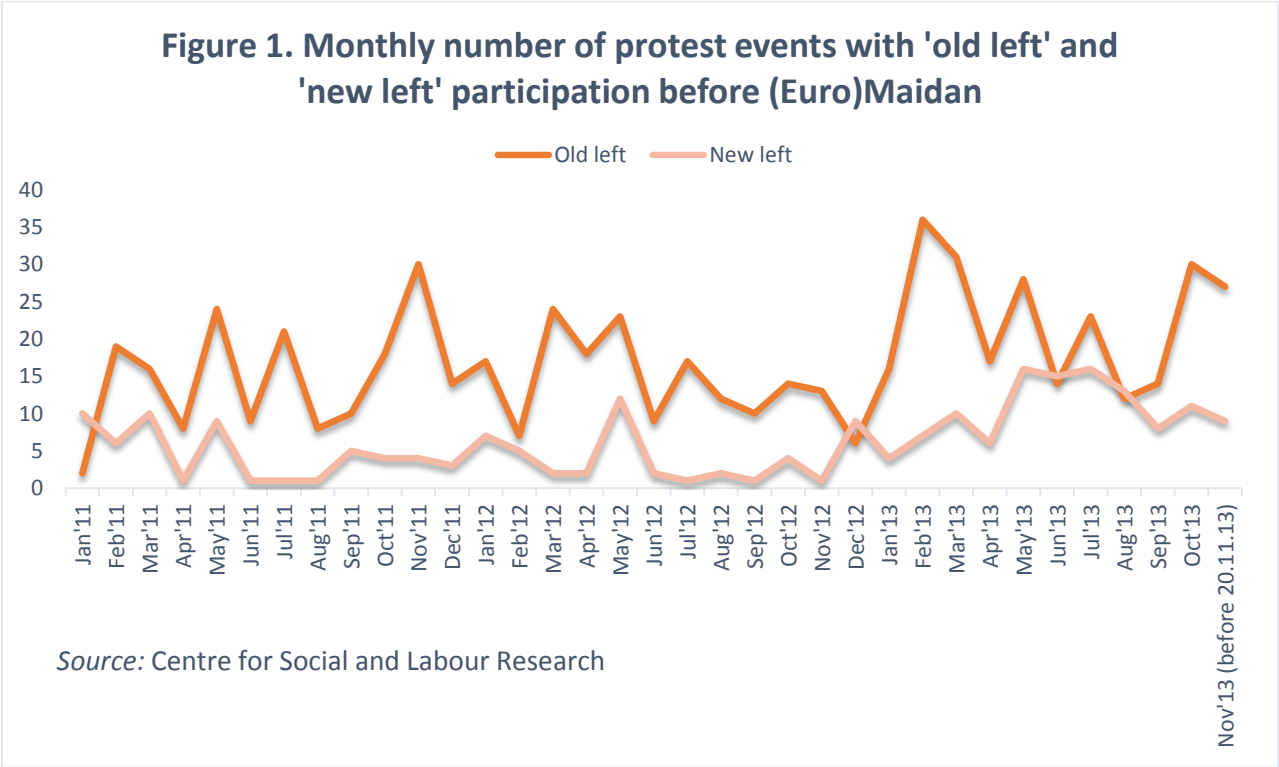
In the UPCD all the reported participants in the events are coded. It is therefore possible to check how often the old left and the new left participated in Ukrainian protest events. In general the protests with the participation of the left did not account for a big share of the Ukrainian protests overall. For almost three years only 597 old left participants and 218 new left participants were reported. Together this was only 9% out of more than 9,300 protest events during this period. For

⁸ Wherever I refer to the protest event data I use an original data set collected under my supervision by the Centre for Social and Labour Research team, which is an independent non-commercial centre for research into social problems and collective protests based in Kiev. The data collection started in September 2009 and is still going on. The result is a systematic database of all protest events (regardless of issues or number of protesters) and reactions to them taking place on the territory of Ukraine since October 2009 based on monitoring of the news lines of almost 200 (as of now) web media covering all the provinces (*oblasts*) in Ukraine as well as major national media and activist websites representing all sectors of social-political activity. The events had been coded manually and, since April 2013, semi-automatically, improving the quality of coding. The databases and codebooks with details on methodology and the sample of sources can be accessed from the CSLR website (<http://cslr.org.ua>). At the time of writing, the CSLR database contains over 30,000 events covering the period from October 2009 until April 2014 and from August 2014 onwards. This includes around 6,000 protest events during the Maidan period from 21 November 2013 until 21 February 2014. The huge number of reports about the post-Maidan events of May to July 2014 are being checked now. In other words, the database covers all reported protest events, repressive and concessionary reactions during the whole period of Viktor Yanukovich's presidency through his ouster in the popular uprising. The protest event in our definition must comply with four criteria: 1) political or social demands or criticism are present; 2) it involves public action (not limited to verbal protests such as petitions); 3) it is made by a group of people or one person outside central government; 4) the locality where the event took place is known and the date of event is at least approximately known (up to a month). In case of complex events, each reported action was coded separately. For example, a fight after a demonstration or a picket during a strike are coded separately as two events in each case. Events lasting more than one day are coded as one event.

comparative purposes, the Ukrainian ultranationalist far right was twice as active and reported in 1,859 protest events (20% of the total).

The CPU was the most active in the old left protests (it participated in 509 protest events out of 597 while the PSPU (74 protest events) and SPU (24) were a long way behind. The new left protest field was, however, more diverse and did not have an overly dominant protest organisation. Borotba was the most active organisation in the pre-Maidan period (it participated in 98 protest events out of 218) followed by the independent student union Direct Action (60 protest events) and the independent labour union Defense of Labour (often together with Autonomous Resistance) (46). Other political organisations like the Autonomous Workers’ Union or Left Opposition participated in two to three dozen events as well.

Figure 1 depicts the monthly number of protests with the left’s participation. The curves are very uneven, meaning that the left protest activity was not stable. There are also evident peaks in May and November almost every year, corresponding to the Labour Day and Russian October Revolution anniversaries – holidays celebrated by the left with rallies and marches being more of a tradition than a strategic struggle. However, there were other big campaigns as well, such as CPU rallies against pension reform and increasing prices for public utilities in 2011 or the Direct Action campaign against the law on higher education at the beginning of the same year. There was also some increase in the number of left protests in 2013. The CPU opposed the then pro-European politics of the Yanukovych government and protested against plans for IMF credit while it later mobilised people to support a customs union with Russia against the European Union association agreement. The new left in 2013 was more active in local labour struggles against unpaid wages or employment fraud.



The old left was able to mobilise not only more frequently but also in bigger numbers (Table 1). Only in two cases did the new left participate in protests with over 1,000 participants (both times in labour protests in 2011). The old left participated and organised at least 55 bigger protests.

Table 1. The reported number of participants in left protests, 2011-2013 (before 20 November 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
<10	27	28	144	1,087
<100	267	122	738	3,501
<1,000	138	26	320	1,394
<10,000	53	2	63	263
<100,000	2	0	8	21
Unknown	110	40	586	3,075
Total	597	218	1,859	9,341

Source: Centre for Social and Labour Research.

What were the issues of protests with old left and new left participation? Overall the majority of Ukrainian protests before Maidan raised socio-economic issues⁹ (Table 2). Despite the major social problem orientation that could be expected from any leftist force, the old left raised socio-economic issues only slightly more frequently than the average and very rarely protested because of civic rights' violations. It is not possible to say that the old left ignored socio-economic struggles but a much higher emphasis on ideological conflicts and 'cultural wars' around historical, language, geopolitical, and religious questions is also significant. By comparison, even Ukrainian far right nationalists participated in ideological protests relatively less frequently than the old left. They also devoted relatively less attention to socio-economic problems but at the same time much more frequently participated in the protests around political struggles and civic rights.

The issues for the protests with the participation of the new left were very different. 70% of them raised socio-economic issues and the new left protested about the violation of civic rights more frequently than the average. The new left protested slightly less frequently than on average about ideological conflicts (and mostly these were antifascist protests) and much less frequently participated in political struggles, reflecting their lack of representation at the political party level.

⁹ Issues' classification: *Political* – protests against or in support of concrete politicians/political parties or government as a whole together with electoral protests; *Ideological* – historical and ideological issues in the majority of cases connected to the regional divide in Ukraine: Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms, anti-Communism, issues related to WWII, Russia's Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol, conflicts around the split of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church etc; *Social and economic* – among the most frequent: urban development and construction projects, labour rights (particularly, wage arrears), environment, state public services (public utilities, transportation, healthcare etc.), and many other; *Civic rights* – defence of civil liberties (particularly freedom of speech), protests against police abuse, officials' illegal actions and corruption. Since 2011, up to three issues were coded for each event, so the sum of the shares is over 100%.

Table 2. Issues of protest events with left participation, 2011-2013 (before November 20, 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Socio-economic	54%	70%	26%	52%
Ideological	56%	23%	47%	24%
Political	34%	17%	40%	29%
Civic rights	5%	32%	28%	21%
N	597	218	1,859	9,341

Source: Centre for Social and Labour Research.

Note: up to three issues were coded for each event, so the sum of the percentages is over 100 per cent.

The left protests were less violent and confrontational than on average, which was normal in Ukraine before Maidan for protests with the participation of identified political actors (Table 3)¹⁰. One of the reasons for this fact is that in violent events the participants often prefer to avoid publicity and are not reported in the media, which are the data source for UPCD. Even considering this fact the Ukrainian far right were much more ready for violence than the left even before the Maidan protests.

Table 3. Tactics of protest events with left participation, 2011-2013 (before 20 November 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Conventional	91%	86%	81%	75%
Confrontational	6%	13%	11%	17%
Violent	3%	1%	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	597	218	1,859	9,341

Source: Centre for Social and Labour Research.

Table 4 shows statistics for how often some structural groups, organisational forms and ideologies were reported participating in protests together with the old left and the new left. The indices for political parties, NGOs and trade unions indicate, first of all, the dominant form of the organisation of the old left and the new left. For the old left this is the party while little cooperation with the unions and NGOs (more precisely, the same as the average) must be noted. The major mobilising structures for the new left were the student and labour unions (mostly Direct Action and Defense of Labour) and the registered formal civic organisations (coded as NGOs) such as Borotba. The old left cooperated quite substantially with Russian nationalists but also cooperated

¹⁰ By the tactics the protests in UPCD project are usually divided into three categories:

conventional – well-known and commonly accepted forms of protest that do not impose direct pressure on the protest targets, such as pickets, rallies, demonstrations, performances, etc.;

confrontational – protest actions involving direct pressure on the goals of a protest ('direct action') but not yet causing any direct damage for people or property, such as blocking roads, strikes, hunger strikes, etc.;

violent – protest actions with causing (or threat of causing) of direct damage to people or property, such as beating or vandalism.

with the Ukrainian far right as well (including Svoboda party) in a small number of mostly local socio-economic protests. The new left were not reported in any protest action together with Russian nationalists and only accidentally (in three events) cooperated with Ukrainian far right. In only five cases was the new left reported at the same protest events together with the old left, reflecting the big political distance between both wings of the Ukrainian left.

The data on the reported participation of some major structural groups (such as workers, students and small business etc.) are also very indicative about the involvement of the left in particular socio-economic struggles. Thus, for example, the old left was not really very active in labour, student, small business or neighborhood protests (participating less than on average). However, they were quite interested in supporting the protests of pensioners, Chernobyl disaster liquidators, WWII and Soviet Afghanistan war veterans, i.e. state dependent groups receiving social payments. By comparison, the new left attempted to participate in workers' and, especially, students' struggles but almost ignored very significant fully national mobilisations of small business, Chernobyl liquidators and Afghanistan war veterans in 2010-11.

Table 4. Some reported participants of the protests together with the new left, 2011-2013 (before 20 November 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Party/politician/local authorities	95%	2%	80%	35%
NGO	21%	39%	26%	22%
Trade union	4%	55%	1%	4%
Russian nationalists	8%	0%	0%	2%
Ukrainian far right	3%	1%	100%	20%
Workers	5%	13%	1%	7%
Students	1%	24%	3%	4%
Small business	1%	1%	2%	5%
Pensioners	6%	0%	1%	2%
Neighborhood	3%	7%	6%	13%
Chernobyl liquidators	3%	0%	1%	3%
Veterans	6%	0%	1%	2%
N	597	218	1,859	9,341

Source: Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data, Centre for Social and Labour Research.

Note: All reported participants in the events are coded separately; this is why the sum of percentages is more than 100%.

The regional distribution is set out in Table 5. As expected, the old left was stronger in protests in the southern and eastern regions where they had more electoral support but also in the central Ukrainian provinces as well while their participation

was far below the average in Kiev and western Ukraine¹¹. At the same time, the new left protest activity was strongly skewed to Kiev city, reflecting the fact that the new left groups generally had much weaker levels of mobilisation in the Ukrainian provinces. Other cities with at least ten new left protests in almost three years were (in descending order): Odessa, Kharkov, and Lviv. By contrast, the Ukrainian far right was more active in western and central regions, including Kiev city.

**Table 5. Regional distribution of the left protests, 2011-2013
(before 20 November 2013)**

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Centre	24%	11%	24%	19%
Crimea	6%	5%	1%	6%
Donbass	17%	4%	5%	9%
East	19%	9%	13%	11%
Kiev	5%	47%	19%	17%
South	22%	16%	10%	15%
West	6%	10%	27%	22%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	597	218	1,859	9,323

Source: Centre for Social and Labour Research.

Note: The 'nationwide' events (i.e. those that were impossible to locate in a particular settlement) are not included in the regional distribution.

By the time the protests started in the late 2013 the left was much weaker in terms of protest mobilisation compared to the far right. The leadership of the parliamentary old left joined the bourgeois elite. The Communist party was perceived as a part of the governing coalition together with the oligarchic Party of Regions and it was aligned with the pro-Russian position in the 'cultural wars' tearing Ukraine apart. The CPU was conservative, old and stagnating as a party structure. It was not strong in terms of socio-economic mobilisations, mainly reactively defending attacks on the remnants of state socialist security, and was weak in terms of cooperation with the unions and in supporting workers' struggles. At the same time the new left was even weaker. While young and open to grassroots' organisation, it did not have any political representation. It was too concentrated in the capital and virtually non-existent publicly in many Ukrainian cities. Moreover, while it was weak the new left was deeply divided by internal conflicts between liberal and libertarian left and post-CPU Marxist-Leninists over issues of party politics and conservative/libertarian values. All of this is

¹¹ The regions of Ukraine are defined as follows:

Centre: Zhytomyrska, Kyivska, Chernihivska, Sumska, Vinnytska, Cherkaska, Kirovohradska, Poltavska oblasts;

Crimea: Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol;

Donbass: Donetska, Luhanska;

East: Kharkivska,, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka oblasts;

Kiev: the city of Kiev;

South: Odeska, Mykolaivska, Khersonska oblasts;

West: Volynska, Rivnenska, Lvivska, Ternopilska, Ivano-Frankivska, Chernivetska, Zakarpatska oblasts.

important to understand what happened with the left during and after the Maidan protests.

THE UKRAINIAN LEFT WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE MAIDAN PROTESTS

The following chapter is divided between an analysis of positions, participation and its political results of the nominally pro-Maidan and anti-Maidan left in the period between the start of the Maidan protests and 21 February 2014 when President Yanukovych left Kiev. The division between the pro-Maidan and anti-Maidan left is necessarily conventional. The pro-Maidan left camp was very diverse, including, on the one side, a marginal United Left and Peasants party (ULP) fully supporting the Maidan protests from their very start and, on the other side, more sceptical left wing activists aligning with Maidan only after the threat of systemic repression against political freedoms under the January 16 laws had emerged. The anti-Maidan left camp was no less diverse, including the PSPU and the CPU quite openly siding with the Yanukovych government during the conflict. However, it also includes Borotba, which at that stage was trying to find a 'third way' between the government and the Maidan movement.

Considering the new left and old left distinction, major new left groups, except for Borotba, eventually supported Maidan in this or that way. However, at the beginning even within Borotba there was a discussion as to whether to participate in the protests or not. It lost political relevance for Borotba when they concluded that the right-wing opposition parties took dominant positions in the protest after the first few days. On the other hand, from the old left parties only United Left and Peasants and, more ambiguously, the SPU supported the Maidan protests.

THE ANTI-MAIDAN LEFT DURING THE MAIDAN PROTESTS

It is worth starting with the anti-Maidan left to understand the obstacles for the left in supporting Maidan, undoubtedly a mass anti-government movement.

The Communist party strongly opposed an EU association agreement with Ukraine. They developed quite a strong economic critique of the agreement and of the European Union in general. They referred to the structure of Ukrainian exports to the EU – mainly goods with low-added value (agriculture and metallurgy products accounted for more than half of Ukrainian exports to the EU in 2013) in contrast to Ukrainian exports to Russia where the share of more complex mechanical engineering products was much higher (more than 30% in 2013). Without a drastic increase in labour productivity and mass investment in the modernisation of Ukrainian industry, it would not have been competitive against European corporations in the deep and comprehensive free trade zone. Besides, it would have been required to spend resources on accommodating to EU standards, at the same time losing markets in the countries of the customs union. Among other things, it would have meant a de-

industrialisation of Ukraine, an increase in unemployment and less state budget income, making it even less possible to invest in the modernization of the economy. In the end, it would have meant the integration of Ukraine as a primarily raw material supplying peripheral economy. In an extensive article written by the CPU leader Petro Symonenko [26], European integration is analysed as a class project of Ukrainian oligarchs who made their wealth primarily from raw materials exports and as a project detrimental to every other class in Ukrainian society. An established consensus between two opposing major political camps in 2013 (both the ruling Party of Regions and the right wing opposition) around backing an EU association agreement supported this point of view. However, it was not easy to explain why, later, the government suddenly decided to suspend signing the agreement, ignoring Russia's direct and indirect pressure in 2013. In fact, the CPU never hid the fact that they supported integration into a Russian Customs Union without construing it as another neoliberal project in favour of the Russian oligarchic ruling class and also not being in the best interests of Ukrainian workers. Despite a 'pragmatic' economic analysis and the fact that the CPU was trying to frame their criticism against euro-idiotic optimism and the hysteria of 'civilizational choice', nevertheless, in speeches and articles they exploited the rhetoric of 'brotherly Eastern Slavic people' presupposing a 'natural' choice in favour of integration with Russia, all of which was determined by cultural proximity. Georgiy Kriuchkov, one of the most authoritative CPU speakers, exploited the same rhetoric and described European integration as conflicting with the values of the majority of Ukrainians in a talk at the conference entitled 'Eastern Orthodox Slavic values as the fundament for Ukraine's civilizational choice':

Western European civilisation also has many positive features including those matching values of the Eastern Slavic civilisation. At the same time, we cannot disregard at least that it is founded on EXTREME INDIVIDUALISM, liberalist (sic) theories of economic and social life organisation. And hypertrophied liberties are more and more transformed not just into permissiveness but into aggressive enforcing that is unacceptable for the Eastern Slavic civilization, as well as for millions of people in European countries, 'liberal' ('free') relation to family problems, marriage, which in the recent years is reflected in legislation allowing same-sex marriages, tolerant behavior to homosexuals ('gays') (sic!) and lesbians. All this are imposed on our society and set as almost indispensable requirements for signing the [EU] association agreement. [27]

In fact, the EU association agreement did not require same-sex marriages. It is particularly telling that Communist leaders and intellectuals were following this typical conservative criticism, later exploited by Russian propaganda and the far right part of Anti-Maidan.

In anticipation of the Vilnius summit where the Ukrainian delegation was supposed to sign the EU association agreement, the CPU organised a campaign for a referendum on the external integration choice for Ukraine, appealing to the fact that European

integration was an elite project and the Ukrainian people had in fact never had a democratic vote on it [28]. The question of the referendum was about joining the customs union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, which, according to the 2013 opinion polls, did have some chance of success¹². The campaign met resistance from the courts and from the Central Electoral Commission that was supposed to register the initiative. On 19 November, Petro Symonenko claimed in the parliament that they had collected the necessary three million signatures [29] although there was criticism that, even in the event of the referendum's success, it would hardly have legally binding consequences [30].

When the Maidan protests started, the CPU position was surprisingly not so hostile. In December 2013 Symonenko was writing about a number of just social grievances (corruption, wage arrears, unemployment, price increase etc.) that were bringing people onto the streets [31] and later, in February 2014, he analysed it as a result of the Ukrainian oligarchic capitalism crisis, even claiming that 'the protest that splashed to the streets in winter 2014 essentially had a socialist agenda because it was possible to solve all those urgent problems only within socialist revolution frames' [32]. However, the right-wing opposition striving for power immediately exploited these just grievances. One of the most frequent Communist labels for the events was the 'struggle between oligarchic clans'. However, later developments proved that among competing 'oligarchic clans' one (pro-governmental) was better for the Communists than another. The dismantling of Lenin's monument in Kiev on 8 December 2013, support for Maidan from EU and US top officials, the growing visibility of far right forces in the protests – all these exacerbated the negative attitude against Maidan from the CPU. On 19 December 2013, the CPU parliamentary group withdrew its support from the resolution against the government. As a result, without the Communist votes it was not able to gain majority support in the parliament. They stated that 'we cannot and will not vote with vandals, nationalists, neo-fascists, oligarchs that work for the US and western interests and rise to power in order to establish in the county a fascist regime' [33]. On 16 January 2014, the CPU parliamentary group made the most obvious step in support of the government against the Maidan protesters, unanimously voting for the package of repressive laws. The CPU submitted two from ten laws in the package, i.e. those establishing criminal responsibility for vandalism against memorials to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War [against Nazi Germany] and for the propaganda of fascism. However, the Communists also fully supported and justified later all other laws limiting political freedoms, presenting them as just a response to 'expansion of the US capital' and 'escalation of the conflict' [34] although, by 16 January 2014, the Maidan protests were in fact at a strategic dead-end and precisely these very laws pushed Maidan towards radicalisation. Despite rhetoric about competing oligarchic clans, the CPU blamed the opposition and the western countries much more heavily than the

¹² In November 2013, both integration projects (EU and Russian) would gain the support of around 40% of the population, according to a poll by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology [283].

government for the escalation of the conflict despite the fact that violence from the protesters usually only followed police repression. Petro Symonenko's positions which he expressed in January and in February 2014 would probably be even closer to the hardline position of the pro-government camp than to those parts of the Party of Regions who were looking for some compromise with the protesters. As the violence continued and extended the CPU warned against the division of the country, the threat of civil war, the establishment of a fascist dictatorship and Ukraine's loss of sovereignty [35]. In February 2014, they proposed federalisation of the country plus a number of other constitutional changes which, however, would barely be supported at that moment either by the government or by the opposition. By voting for the 16 January repressive laws the CPU took part of the guilt for fomenting the civil war and by the end of Maidan proved incapable of forming any significant mobilisation behind their anti-crisis course of action.

The Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine's position was essentially the same. However, as usual, it used only stronger and more clamorous language. Almost from the very start of the protests, the PSPU described it as a US-backed Nazi coup in support of the 'eurocolonisation' of Ukraine [36, 37] with even more 'civilisational' aspects going as far as to speak about the conflict between 'militant Greek Catholics' and the eastern Orthodox majority [38] and siding closer to the hardliners of the pro-governmental camp.

On the contrary, Borotba was trying to stand apart from the CPU and, obviously, from the PSPU. They shared with them a large amount of economic criticism of the European integration prospects for Ukraine [39] but, at the same time, they did not support integration into the customs union with Russia. Although the criticism of the Customs Union was much less elaborated than the criticism of the EU, it was perceived as a 'similar neoliberal institution' [40] containing all the problems of the EU in its embryonic form. Borotba leader Serhii Kyrychuk wrote that the customs union with Russia would not give Ukraine an opportunity for equitable and mutually beneficial integration as long as there was a high level of competition between Ukrainian and Russian industries and mistrust between political leadership [39].

As expected, Borotba did not support Maidan, stating that 'the true revolution will put social demands forward', not geopolitical ones, and in the beginning perceiving it as a new and even worse edition of the Orange revolution of 2004, mainly agreeing with the CPU that people were just allowed to be manipulated by the 'oligarchic clans' [40]. However, Borotba never exploited any 'civilisational' or conservative rhetoric against Maidan. They clearly condemned the repressive laws of 16 January, even calling to the international left to stop any cooperation with the 'extreme conservative' CPU which voted for them [41]. After Maidan's radicalisation, unlike the CPU they did not support the government as a 'lesser evil'. Nevertheless they warned that 'Maidan's victory will lead not to an extension of democracy but to the establishment of a regime more authoritarian and repressive than even Yanukovich's

regime' and 'despite mass participation and support from a significant part of 'civil society'', it will mean a right-wing, reactionary turn in Ukrainian politics' [40].

However, in the end Borotba was not able to form any 'third camp' that would be critical both to the government and to the right-wing opposition. Their campaigns against the threat of the civil war and against intrusion of foreign countries into Ukrainian affairs [42] remained only a short series of small and symbolic actions¹³ completely on the margins of Ukrainian political life.

Preliminary analysis of the CSLR protest event data during Maidan period is also very interesting in this respect¹⁴. Overall, apart from more than 3,000 pro-Maidan protests in the period between 21 November 2013 and 20 February 2014 (i.e. before the Maidan victory) UPCD contains reports about at least 316 Anti-Maidan mobilisations. It is widely believed that those protests had a strong vertical component, i.e. many of the rallies and protest camps were organised from above and paid by the ruling Party of Regions. However, the leftist Anti-Maidan movement was quite autonomous and usually self-organised. In 46 (15%) Anti-Maidan protests during this period (i.e. with an agenda against European integration, against Maidan and its actions), participation of leftists was reported. So the left was a minor but significant party of the Anti-Maidan movement. The participation of the CPU was reported in 31 cases and of the PSPU in 10, and in six of the minor organisations including Borotba. However, in only six of 46 cases did the left participate together with the Party of Regions.

The leftist Anti-Maidan movement was usually completely peaceful and legal and was going on in the form of conventional small-size rallies. In only four protest events did they use confrontational or violent tactics compared to 82 Anti-Maidan protest events with confrontational and violent tactics in general. In only two events a leftist Anti-Maidan participation of over 1,000 people was reported and these were events together with the Party of Regions. The leftist Anti-Maidan was heavily skewed to the eastern and southern regions even compared to Anti-Maidan in general: only 17% (eight cases) of these protests happened in other regions, among them only one in Kiev and none in western regions (compared to 26% or 81 cases for Anti-Maidan in general). The highest number of left wing Anti-Maidan events was reported in Lugansk (8) and Odessa (5).

Despite the participation of left wing parties in these protests only in three cases were some concrete socio-economic demands or criticism reported. During the first week of the Maidan protests, the leftist Anti-Maidan movement was criticising European association and demanding to join the customs union with Russia. The government

¹³ Only 4 protest events with participation of Borotba were reported in UPCD during Maidan period.

¹⁴ For analysis of the CSLR protest event data in this paper I treat multi-day rallies, pickets, marches, motorcades during Maidan and Anti-Maidan protests as single events. It would be more correct to analyze them as multiple events for each day the protestors gathered to make contentious claims. Such recoding of Maidan and Anti-Maidan protest event data is proceeding in the time of writing. However, it would not change the results of the analysis in any substantive way. For example, the recoding adds only eight protest events with the left participation during Maidan period and only a couple of dozen left protests after 21 February 2014.

was the target of these protests. Some of these protests had homophobic demands, particularly, against the imagined 'threat' of same-sex marriages allegedly coming together with European integration. In addition, during some of these protests protesters already started to raise the Russian flag and, in 17 cases overall, the anti-Maidan leftists participated together with Russian nationalist organisations. When Lenin's monument in Kiev was dismantled and, especially when the Maidan protests radicalised, the target of leftist Anti-Maidan demands switched from the government to Maidan protesters.

Overall, not feeling that it wanted to support the Maidan protests because of the European integration agenda and strong right-wing positions there, the CPU even helped to fuel their radicalisation and the division of the country by siding with the government and supporting an attempt at systemic limitations on political freedoms. At the same time, the left wing Anti-Maidan protests during that period remained quite a marginal phenomenon without a significant political impact. A qualitatively different dynamic started on 21 February 2014 when Yanukovich left Kiev and the focus of the Maidan protesters moved to the south-eastern regions, particularly with attacks against Soviet monuments.

WHY DID OTHER LEFT-WING GROUPS JOIN THE MAIDAN PROTESTS?

As mentioned before, many of the new left eventually supported the Maidan protests. Why?

Some of the new left simply shared at least some pro-European dreams. This was especially visible in discussions about gender issues and minority rights when, from the left liberal feminist perspective, the EU was obviously presenting a better alternative than Russia's conservative legislation. The EU was perceived as a locus for liberal values exemplified by a naïve slogan that the 'EU is equal rights for every person'¹⁵. The left liberal inability to grasp the centrality of class analysis and politics in favor of various non-class issues easily allowed the EU's limited progressive achievements to overshadow the wider picture. The overall imperialist and neoliberal nature of this project, their potential consequences for the Ukrainian economy and the working classes were quite often not understood at all or perceived as something of secondary importance when it seemed possible to articulate at least some progressive values in the generally conservative Ukrainian society.

The most extreme flavour of a naïve pro-European position did not even come from the new left but from the United Left and Peasants party, which unequivocally supported the Maidan protests from their very beginnings and kept one tent in the protesters' camp in Kiev, as they claim, for 'all 97 days of bitter confrontation' [43], where a few people were supposedly doing some agitation-type activities. As mentioned before, the ULP was formed from small splinter parties from the SPU (the

¹⁵Photo on the "Self-organization and social-economic protest at #EuroMaidan" Facebook page, 27 November 2014: <https://www.facebook.com/leftmaidan/photos/a.332391760235909.1073741832.331218437019908/332391776902574/?type=1&theater>.

Justice party led by Stanislav Nikolaienko first of all) and joined by other no less marginal organisations. The ULP fully supported an EU association agreement with Ukraine, even including the deep and comprehensive free trade zone. Although the statement from the ULP mentioned some crisis tendencies in the EU, they were nevertheless adamant that it does not have such a 'wild social polarisation, oligarchic dictatorship; it prioritises the middle class and working people. Quality education, healthcare, social security are available for the majority of people' [44]. Beyond this rosy picture, any discussion for the concrete consequences of the concrete agreements for Ukraine was absent. In the later statements the ULP slightly criticised Maidan for putting too much focus on European integration and for its lack of a socio-economic programme, instead proposing a programme combining liberal (decentralisation, fight with corruption, civic control over officials) and mild socio-democratic policies (state control over natural monopolies, progressive taxation, social security and increase of wages and pensions) [45].

Other pro-Maidan left activists were trying to be more critical towards the EU although not necessarily less naïve in the result. For example, a leaflet distributed by the left activists for the protesters in the early days of Maidan tried to bring more substance to the protest's vague demands. For example, it said that the EU association agreement would probably be beneficial only for big business. Instead it was more important to demand decisive political, social and economic changes: democratisation, justice, prevention of police abuse, good wages, free quality education and health care, little corruption, environmentally sustainable development, comfortable and accessible transport infrastructure, a world without borders, tolerance to everyone etc. In sum, it was a classical statement 'for everything good and against everything bad'. The leaflet appealed to everyone's participation, which could, in the end, build a 'true Europe' while the EU association was just the first step [46]. At the same time, the pro-Maidan left Facebook public page entitled 'Self-organization and social-economic protest at #EuroMaidan' also published a number of materials criticising the European integration results, particularly in the Balkans and other eastern European countries. They also tried to connect the ideas of the Occupy movement and of European anti-austerity protests¹⁶ with the Maidan struggles but without much success. Striking features of Euromaidan were that there was a much stronger identification with the European elite, while there were no serious initiatives to build bridges with European popular movements and the weak new left could hardly change the nature of the Maidan movement by making it closer to their ideological preferences.

Other pro-Maidan positions were also contradictory. The Left Opposition supported the political part of the EU association agreement, saying that 'it will facilitate the

¹⁶ As an example check the picture from French protests against the pension age increase, "Self-organization and social-economic protest at #EuroMaidan" Facebook-page, November 25, 2014: <https://www.facebook.com/leftmaidan/timeline/story?ut=43&wstart=1357027200&wend=1388563199&hash=-7930549229942595711&pagefilter=3>.

extension of democracy, an increase in the transparency of the authorities, just courts and will limit corruption'. However, they clearly opposed the deep and comprehensive free trade zone, calling it 'integration of our oligarchs into the EU's economic system', which will only increase the peripheral and neocolonial situation of the Ukrainian economy (as well as the Russian Customs Union) [47]. Likewise, the Socialist Party of Ukraine supported the political part of the agreement but demanded more negotiation on the 'trade-economic' component¹⁷. The position seemed to be smart but the problem was to what extent it was realistic or was it wishful thinking without any prospects not only of being accepted by the EU but even of winning the hearts of the Maidan protesters.

These contradictions, vagueness and inconsistency led anti-Maidan sceptics, from Borotba first of all, to interpret the moves of the pro-Maidan left as nothing more than 'Euro-lefty opportunism' [48] or inability to break with middle class ideologies and prejudices, forcing the left to go with the stream of the people around and trying to accommodate to their European illusions [49]. This kind of criticism only antagonised relations of the new left with Borotba. However, it was quite evident that, besides the substantive reasons for supporting the Maidan protests, (either connected to limited EU advantages in comparison with the Russian Customs Union or supporting the protest against police violence) there were clearly other motivations as well. For example, there was a rather emotional than political attraction to 'spontaneous anarchism' and self-organisation of 'the biggest and the most radical social protest in post-Soviet Ukraine' [50] with a strong (although not overwhelming) grassroots component [51, pp. 126-128]. There was also a 'populist' motivation for some of the left 'to be with the people' while trying to articulate some of their ideas in an attractive way during the mass protest: the pink flag with EU stars symbolising 'Socialist Europe'¹⁸ used by the left opposition activists at the beginning of the protests could probably serve as the best symbol for this strategy. The crucial problem and the tragedy of the situation were that they apparently did not have other options given their existing resources and circumstances. Several left authors [52, 51] reflecting on the new left participation in Maidan write about the basic dilemma for the left: either participate in this protest, despite all its problems, alien agenda and

¹⁷ Though the SPU generally stuck to their long-term demand 'to build Europe in Ukraine', meaning that it is not by joining either the EU or the Russian customs union as such that will improve the lives of Ukrainians but substantive changes in the political system [278]. After the first dispersal of the protest camp in Kiev on 30 November and street fights and capturing state buildings on the next day, the SPU condemned violence in politics, blaming 'extremist forces' from both sides of the conflict and warning against division of the country and the possibility of a Balkan or Middle East type of conflict in Ukraine. While blaming both sides – the government and the opposition – the SPU quite early in December 2013 demanded the reinstatement of the Constitution of 2004, more powers for the parliament, the resignation of the government and new elections to the parliament [279]. However, local organisation cells showed a wide range of positions: from full support of the Maidan movement in Sumy [280] to mostly condemning far right Maidan radicals in Kirovohrad [281].

¹⁸ <http://gaslo.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/majdan1.jpg>. In Ukrainian language it is possible to make the same abbreviation for EU and 'Socialist Europe': ЕС = «Європейський Союз» = «Європа Соціалістична».

hostile attitude towards the left, or stay on the margins of one of the most important political events in the country and lose an opportunity to gain valuable experience.

After repressive laws had been passed on 16 January, the change of the Maidan agenda became clear: from EU integration to a protest against police violence, government and systemic assault on political freedoms afterwards. As a Left Opposition activist stated, 'January 16 was the point of no return', writing about the regime and comparing Yanukovych to Pinochet [53]. However, it was not an obvious choice for the pro-Maidan left. For example, the ULP and the SPU warned against a potential civil war and distanced themselves from 'irresponsible', 'extremist' actions from both sides although they did not withdraw support from Maidan but started to sound quite similar to the Communist party [54, 55]. However, for many from the new left groups it was a decisive point to support the movement, including its violent part. Some anarchists and subcultural antifascists even agreed on a temporary 'truce' with the far right, joining them in mass fights with the riot police [56, p. 94]. The Direct Action student union called on people to join all forms of protest, including 'active resistance' [57]. The anarchist Autonomous Workers' Union in Kiev, which was previously very critical towards Maidan, started to support the protest against the police violence [58] in sharp contrast to their previous statements emphasising strong far right participation and even framing the events as a conflict between two types of fascism [59]¹⁹.

HOW DID THE LEFT TAKE PART IN THE MAIDAN PROTESTS?

The left's participation in the Maidan protests took various forms: taking part in peaceful protests, violent actions, agitating, organising educational and cultural activities, strikes and occupations and supporting media and humanitarian initiatives. However, there were two major weaknesses of the left's participation in Maidan.

First, the left's activism was often sporadic and chaotic, without coordination between the different groups, sometimes even taking the form of just individual participation in the Maidan events (especially at the beginning of the protest) [51, p. 128]. As Zakhar Popovych (LO) said in an interview:

...when all the different left groups seeing the mass nature of the movement started attempts to intervene there, all those attempts were too scattered – in different places, at different times – so it was impossible to reach any critical mass to make a really significant impact like the rightists were able to do, unfortunately. [60, p. 106]

Usually there was no permanent area of sustained everyday leftist presence in the Maidan camps. For some groups the whole participation took the form of 'Sunday agitation', i.e. people coming to the biggest rallies at the weekends in small groups with leaflets [51, p. 129]. One reason for this was the general weakness of the new

¹⁹ However, they clearly distanced themselves from the 'senseless' street violence that only helped the government, as they stated [58].

left groups in terms of resources. The lack of a strong organisational structure and their internal divisions made it harder to mobilise a critical mass of people in the right place at the right time. Another reason was the attacks on the left activists, not allowing them to create a point of permanent agitation. In Kiev the left were attacked several times at the very beginning of the Maidan protests while trying to reframe 'European values' in a social and feminist way and being quickly identified by the far right. When, on 4 December 2013, Denis Levin, then an organiser in the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine and a Borotba activist, attempted to establish the union's tent and start social agitation with two other activists from the CFTU, they were attacked as 'Communists' and *titushki* by a crowd from Maidan [61]. There were individual attacks not only in the beginning but in the later phases of the protest as well.

However, these attacks did not stop the left's activity in Maidan. The new left were able to participate in feminist initiatives such as the Second Half of Maidan or Women's Company (*Zhinocha sotnia*), which were trying to emphasise the gender equality dimension of Europe or to delve into the reproduction of sexist divisions of labour in the Maidan camp, by organising educational and cultural events in a so called Open University. They also organised and supported humanitarian initiatives like the Hospital Guards, which prevented arrests in the hospitals of the protesters injured in the street violence. However, the left's participation in these kinds of activities was possible precisely because it was not perceived as the left's political activity at all. The women's initiatives hardly moved beyond the liberal feminist agenda. When the left was trying to intervene with more social demands, they usually strategically presented themselves as just 'social activists'²⁰. The humanitarian initiatives or participation in the violent actions together with the right wing activists precluded open left political subjectivity by definition. When the anarchists participating in the Kiev Maidan camp attempted to institutionalise themselves within the Maidan Self-Defense²¹ and tried to form their own unit, called the Black Company (*Chorna sotnia*), they were forced to leave the camp by outnumbering extreme right-wingers close to the Svoboda party, who did not allow them to form any unit with an open 'anti-Ukrainian' identity.

From all the left groups in Kiev, the Left Opposition attempted the most grounded political intervention into Maidan. They prepared a ten-point political programme [62], trying to adapt classical left demands (nationalisation, workers' control, progressive taxation, stopping capital flight to offshore locations, 'social lustration' – banning rich people from holding public office, stopping cooperation with international financial institutions etc.) to Ukrainian context and political language.

²⁰ The name of the major public page for coordination of the new left at Maidan reflects this tendency: "Self-organization and social-economic protest at #EuroMaidan".

²¹ A paramilitary structure created by the protesters in response to the police violence. It is telling that the head of Maidan Self-Defence was Andrii Parubii, one of the first founders of the far right Social-National Party of Ukraine, later rebranded as the famous Svoboda, and the leader of its youth wing the Patriot of Ukraine. Maidan Self-Defence was structured into *sotni*, a historical Ukrainian name for a company (as a military unit).

However, due to organisational weakness, they were able to propagate the programme only during irregular talks and in irregularly distributed leaflets.

Participation in the student movement during Maidan, which became a subject of pride for Kiev's new left, appeared to be the same kind of self-censored 'social activism' without political results in the final instance. Starting from late November 2013, Direct Action union activists participated in the student marches and rallies, trying to sow some seeds of socio-economic agenda into the infertile soil of mostly neoliberal-nationalist Kiev student milieus and predictably without much success [63, p. 146]. The student mobilisations continued in a failed attempt at an occupation strike in one of the elite universities (KMA) after the repressive laws of 16 January, where the left had previously had relatively a stronger position and at least were not seen negatively. It could have become an alternative centre for the struggle against Yanukovych. However, the majority of the students who identified with the main Maidan movement and who feared for their careers as the state could close the university, did not support the strike. The strike initiative turned into a regular student assembly in one of the buildings in Kiev city centre occupied by Maidan protesters. The assembly was a format appropriated from western progressive movements. However, the contents of the coordination in the assembly were not left wing political actions but mobilisations with a typical pro-Maidan agenda. It all ended in the occupation of the Ministry of Education in the final days of the Maidan protests. The latter occupation was the culmination of Kiev left wing activism in Maidan when the student protesters forced the new Minister of Education Serhiy Kvit (with a far right political background) to discuss the terms for leaving the occupied building. However, even in this comfortable niche for leftist participation in the protests, they ultimately failed to go further than subjects such as the (neo)liberal agenda of university autonomy, transparency and fighting corruption and failed to institutionalise the student assembly as a permanent point for critical control over education policies [63, pp. 150-152].

In other Ukrainian regions, opportunities for left wing participation in local 'maidans' were not always exactly like in Kiev. Two cases, in particular, stand out. In Kharkov, where the far right was relatively weak and split, the local anarchists (AWU) were able to organise a more sustained level of agitation activity among students and some neighbourhoods, focusing on social problems and anti-authoritarian ideas. They gradually won some respect and recognition from the liberal Maidan majority. Kharkov was the only city where the left (anarchists) were included in the coordination council of the local 'maidan' [64]. In Lviv the left nationalists from the Autonomous Resistance played an even more visible role in the local 'maidan'. In western Ukrainian cities and provinces the political conjuncture for Maidan was quite specific as the local authorities were controlled by the opposition parties. In Lviv, particularly, the far right Svoboda was a *de facto* ruling party. The AR there was already a relatively strong movement which was sometimes able to mobilise several hundred people. It actively participated in local social protests and got into an open

confrontation with Svoboda even before Maidan started. The AR's main line of action was to radicalise the protests, to call for the true revolution bringing fundamental changes to the social and political structures and to not allow Maidan just to change the ruling parties [65]. They called for people not to trust the political opposition and Svoboda in particular as they would necessarily betray the protesters. On 24 January the AR led the occupation of the regional state administration building, demanding the resignations of the head of the Lviv province administration from the pro-Yanukovych Party of Regions [66]²². Later, the Autonomous Resistance might have played a crucial role in initiating the so-called Night of Rage in Lviv on 18 February after riot police started their final attempt to destroy the Maidan camp in Kiev city centre [67]. During the Night of Rage, crowds attacked and pillaged the prosecutor's office, the security service's office, the police department and the military, where they also captured large amounts of arms (in the following days supposedly used by the protesters in Kiev against riot police). Similar attacks took place in a number of other western Ukrainian cities. As the criminal cases relating to the Night of Rage events are still open (even under the post-Maidan government) and the AR was accused of capturing and not returning the weapons, they are not inclined to disclose details about their role in the events [68].

Thus both Kharkov anarchists and Lviv left wing nationalists played a relatively more important role in the Maidan mobilisations in their localities. However, in both cases not only did local political conjunctures facilitate better results but also the AR and Kharkov AWU avoided associating themselves with the left. The AR usually called themselves 'nationalists' or 'populists' (*narodniki*) and, in the Kharkov case, 'social activists' or 'anarchists' [51, p. 129], which was more tolerable precisely because the anarchism itself in Ukraine 'might seem to be compatible with nationalist and liberal perspectives and is not perceived as a "left" ideology' [52, p. 48].

RESULTS AND ALTERNATIVES

Overall, the political impact of the Ukrainian left on the Maidan protests was close to zero. There is no evidence that the left changed the course of major events, making them in any significant way closer to social revolution with a progressive agenda instead of a regionally skewed popular rebellion bringing a neoliberal-nationalist government to power. There is no evidence of their propaganda activities having any significant impact on support for socialist demands. The participation of the new left in the Maidan protests was almost invisible for the media. According to CSLR Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data, between 21 November 2013 and 20 February 2014, the left participation was reported in only 20 events (19 with the new left and one protest with SPU participation) out of more than 3,000 Maidan protests overall, i.e. in less than 1% (compared with 25% of Maidan protests with reported far right participation).

²² The opposition parties did not support this occupation calling them provocateurs and the AR left the building after "Svoboda" members of local council failed to evict them.

Did the left at least improve their own positions and resources as a result of participation in the Maidan protests? In Kiev the left opposition activists attempted to participate in the city elections in May 2014, using an innovative procedure of liquid democracy. However, they failed miserably, securing only several hundred votes for each candidate. Taras Salamanyuk, who conducted research among the regional left in the Maidan and Anti-Maidan protests, writes about an 'infrastructure leap'. The regional left groups who took part in the Maidan protests, especially the most successful among them like Lviv left nationalists and Kharkov anarchists, gained valuable experience, some finances from donations to the protest camps, important connections with liberal and other activist groups and increased their recognition among the public and in the media media [51, p. 131]. However, the relative scale of the 'leap' should be taken into account as well. Considering that the left had a very marginal position before Maidan, it was not so impressive to become at least something. Salamanyuk notes that they became recognisable as regional-level opposition at best while at the same time they were barely able to sustain their results when Maidan turned into a patriotic mobilisation after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass began. 'We are at the same spot as we were before', replied an activist from Lviv Autonomous Resistance when commenting on their results in the three months after Maidan [51, p. 133].

Perhaps, the most obvious result was the experience, even if ultimately unsuccessful, of participation in a mass movement and a strong motivation among the left to reflect on unsatisfactory results and to reconsider inadequate political practices in a different post-Maidan context. Zakhar Popovych called a move from different left groups to finally form a new left political party 'a post-Maidan effect' [60, p. 107]. An anarchist blogger Alexander Volodarsky recognises that small pickets of 20-100 people that the new left were able to organise before and which sometimes had some impact are not perceived as anything important at all after Maidan, so anarchists have to seriously reconsider their strategy and tactics [69].

The weak performance by the left in Maidan was a combined result of very different factors. As mentioned before, the new left had very weak levels of resources (e.g. in terms of activists, media, infrastructure etc.) when the Maidan protests started and these were incomparable to the mobilisation resources of their right-wing competitors. Moreover, the capacity of the new left for united action and to merge scarce resources was undermined by splits and animosity. At the same time, the CPU, the strongest left wing party in Ukraine with parliamentary representation at that moment, which could mobilise much bigger resources supported the government *de facto*. This was a logical result of their long-term degradation into a bourgeois party with Russian nationalist and conservative elements in terms of their ideology. However, it was also the nature of the Maidan movement itself, its ideology, its mass base and the nature of the most organised participants which channelled the social grievances of Ukrainians into a confrontation between Yanukovych and the opposition, between Ukrainian and Russian nationalism and into a geopolitical choice

between competing imperialist blocs. Was there an alternative? If only Ukraine had had a very different Maidan or a very different left wing movement. Some pro-Maidan left wing bodies regretted that no 'Left Sector' emerged in the Kiev Maidan camp that was able to unite disjointed left wing groups into an effective coalition as the previously quite marginal far right groups and organisations were able to unite into the famous Right Sector [52, p. 49]. If we look at the regional cases where the left was more efficient, we can speculate that the potential 'Left Sector' would probably have gained much more visibility but it would probably not have changed the course of events. The Right Sector proposed a new violent strategy (or rather tactics) when Maidan was stagnating in the dead end of senseless Sunday rallies in mid-January. As CSLR data shows, the left was incomparably weaker in terms of violence. They could probably have attempted a political strikes' strategy instead. However, for this strategy to have been efficient, the left would have needed strong connections with workers' collectives, which they had not had. The new left had relatively strong positions only within Kiev's elite students, who were conformist and infected by the neoliberal European dream.

There were also immediate negative consequences of participation in Maidan for the pro-Maidan left, which might have been even stronger and might have a more long-term nature than any positive results. Participation in a questionable movement without real capacity to turn it into the left direction from the very start posed questions about compromises with hostile forces and a hostile agenda and also questions about at which point it would be necessary to break with them. If the pro-Maidan left had a clear vision of an independent socialist strategy, it would be much easier to make specific decisions reacting to complex developments. However, for the new left, especially in a disorganised milieu outside ideological groups, lack of clear strategic understanding was precisely one of the biggest problems. That is why many of them were quite susceptible to follow the logic of the Maidan movement even when this logic was leading not in the direction of political and social revolution but in the direction of patriotic mobilisation. Of course, Russian intervention added a lot to this evolution and was a frequent refrain in leftist discussions about the degradation of the grassroots progressive elements of Maidan. However, the question was not only whom to blame but also what to do and whether it was not already the right time to make a decisive break with the movement rather than continue justifying its more and more questionable developments.

The attitudes towards the new government exemplified this tendency in particular. In discussions in sceptical anti-Maidan circles, the pro-Maidan left felt it necessary to justify that the new government was not really as right wing as sceptics and especially the Russian media stated. Usually it was not a question for them that the new government was neoliberal and/or oligarchic but, at the same time, they did not perceive it as a 'fascist junta' (as many Anti-Maidan supporters and separatists called it). In the spring of 2014 this label was obviously out of touch with reality. However, attempts to defend the Ukrainian government as a more democratic and progressive

state against Russia in the context of the annexation of Crimea or against emerging separatist republics in Donbass were indeed problematic. It was particularly tempting to stay attached to the new government as some people at least close to the left took a couple of government positions. Inna Sovsun, a liberal expert on higher education, who previously cooperated with the new left in urban protests and in the student movement, was assigned as the first deputy of the Minister of Education Serhiy Kvit. Her brother Nazariy Sovsun worked in the Ministry of Culture's press service. In her reflection on the student assembly during Maidan (where she was one of the coordinators), Nina Khodorivska, assumes in a quite naïve way that the student assembly had performed its function and is not necessary any more while the new Ministry of Education leadership will continue with the education reforms in the interests of the students [70, pp. 140-143]. In reality, the post-Maidan Ministry of Education is proceeding with quick neoliberal reforms and revising those few progressive elements which the new law on higher education (the focus of student struggles in 2011-12) contained [71] without even any weak resistance from the disoriented student left.

It seems to be true that the Ukrainian left faced a dilemma between taking part in the Maidan protests and staying out of the major political events in the country (like the anti-Maidan left). However, the choice for the participation option carried with it the risk of losing its independent socialist position and becoming just a 'left wing' for Ukrainian liberals and nationalists. At the same time, the earlier divisions have deepened and any chances for united left wing political action between the pro- and anti-Maidan left have faded. The lack of a clear independent strategy, a postmodern incapacity for consistent class analysis and class politics and an emotional rather than political participation in the Maidan protests as voluntary supporters of the liberal-nationalist agenda, had an impact on the left. This has made it harder for the left to resist polarisation between competing nationalist and imperialist camps.

ANTI-MAIDAN PROTESTS

The Anti-Maidan movement acquired a completely different, grassroots dynamic in late February 2014, in contrast to the mostly top-down Anti-Maidan organised by the Party of Regions. The movement challenged the new post-Maidan neoliberal-nationalist government, voicing not only the demands of pro-Russian nationalism but also some social grievances. In relation to Anti-Maidan, too, the left were split, but the discussions were even tougher, turning into factual attacks and mutual denunciations. Generally, the pattern of support or aversion to Anti-Maidan mirrored Maidan loyalties. Nevertheless, not everything was so predictable and some of the former Maidan left could express sympathy with some elements of the Anti-Maidan movement, while different organisations and parties from the anti-Maidan left camp also adopted significantly different positions and strategies in relation to the protests.

Yet attempts to turn the Anti-Maidan movement towards the left, or at least to bring about important political achievements for the left, were ultimately a failure.

PRO-MAIDAN LEFT AND ANTI-MAIDAN

Positions towards the Anti-Maidan movement were obviously related to assessments of the results of Maidan and of the post-Maidan government. The United Left and Peasants party (in April 2014 they decided to revert to the older name of 'Justice' party) was the most supportive from among the left. It recommended voting for Petro Poroshenko at the presidential elections [72] and abstained from traditional May Day rallies in order not to rock the boat during 'a difficult political situation in the country' [73]. Though even they extensively criticised the new government from a social-democratic point of view and pointed to the unsatisfactory socio-economic situation as the root cause of the separatist revolt [73]. However, *initially*, most of the pro-Maidan left organisations did not have particularly high hopes for the 'revolution'. Rather, they understood that the overthrow of Yanukovich itself had not changed either the political or the social system. 'The true revolution has only begun' was a common refrain in some leftist texts in late February 2014 [74, 75]. Alternatively, Maidan at least provided opportunities for 'true democratisation' [76]. Essentially, the pro-Maidan left hoped for a development of the progressive elements in the Maidan movement that would bring anti-oligarchic demands and calls for social justice and democratisation to the forefront. When that did not happen, it was very tempting to primarily blame the Russian intervention that precluded, or at least delayed and distorted, progressive developments, rather than blaming inherent aspects of the Maidan movement itself.

Some among the pro-Maidan left attempted to rationalise these attitudes, theorising Maidan as a 'bourgeois revolution' [77, 78, 79]. As the story went, the Maidan prevented power being monopolised by Yanukovich's 'Family' clan, restored bourgeois political pluralism and was supposed to decrease the 'corruption rent' that the bureaucracy extracted from the Ukrainian economy. In this framework, even a conflict between one of the richest oligarchs, Igor Kolomoisky, and the slightly less rich oligarch Petro Poroshenko, the new Ukrainian president, was interpreted as a struggle between 'counter-revolutionary' and 'revolutionary' camps rather than a conflict between competing oligarchic groups not fundamentally different from each other [79]. The anarchists from the Autonomous Workers' Union were the main promoters of this theorisation; however, it seems they were just framing a much wider range of feelings in semi-Marxist terminology. A large part of the pro-Maidan liberal and libertarian left hoped for the 'modernisation' of Ukrainian society. Despite their radical and anti-capitalist identity they would implicitly support changes towards transparent state institutions, the rule of law, decreased corruption, a civic rather than ethnic nation, tolerance in relation to minorities – everything that the post-Soviet transformation had promised but failed to bring to Ukraine – and shared this 'European ideology' with Ukrainian national-liberals.

From this perspective, the Anti-Maidan protests were obviously perceived as a 'reactionary mutiny', an integral part of a Russian 'counter-revolutionary' intervention. The pro-Maidan left usually did not go so far as to reject any grassroots component behind the 'Russian spring' and to reduce it completely to a Russian special operation. However, they were explicitly unsympathetic to it. Partially, they repeated the commonplaces of pro-Ukrainian liberal criticism depicting Anti-Maidan as heavily manipulated by Russia and the former Donbass elite from the Party of Regions. They emphasised the participation of paid provocateurs, later on Russian nationalist volunteers, special agents and military men. As a Kharkov anarchist from the AWU stated, ' "people's republics" are just a formal fiction intended to symbolically and legally legitimise the Russian army's intervention in Ukraine' [80]. Frequently-appearing Russian flags and appeals to Russia during Anti-Maidan rallies were also met with irritation. For the pro-Maidan left it was especially worrisome to see the strong participation of the former police and military officers in emerging DPR and LPR state structures and militias, which allowed them to call separatist republics real 'juntas' in response to the 'fascist junta' cliché from the opponents of the Kiev government [81]. One anonymous Donetsk anarchist called the events in Donbass 'a bandit-cop coup d'état wrapped in a "popular" cover' [82]. Popular Anti-Maidan slogans in support of Berkut – the infamous riot police under Yanukovych, guilty of mass violence against Maidan protesters – was interpreted by some among the pro-Maidan left as definitive proof of the inherently 'authoritarian' nature of the movement, though Anti-Maidan supporters themselves saw Berkut officers as heroes who resisted the Maidan 'fascists' – a much worse evil from their perspective [83]. The Russian nationalist far right in leading positions within the movement, bringing a conservative agenda to bear [84], was a sign that the left could not support the Anti-Maidan movement. If the anti-Maidan left sometimes emphasised the class dimension of the protests, pointing to their social base in the most industrial regions of Ukraine and probably the high participation of workers, some among the pro-Maidan left mirrored such appeals, emphasising the participation of criminals and 'lumpens', coming very close to a social racism shared with many Ukrainian liberals against Anti-Maidan [85].

Many of these points about Anti-Maidan were indeed correct. However, many of them were correct about the Maidan protests as well, which this part of the left, nevertheless, eventually supported. However, the peripherisation and increased dependency of the Ukrainian economy in the course of European integration was perfectly predictable, as was neoliberal austerity. It was also predictable that the opposition oligarchic parties would exploit the Maidan protests to seize power after Yanukovych. The Ukrainian far right was strongly present at Maidan, playing a far more important role than liberal supporters were usually ready to admit, gaining visibility and acquiring more resources. Political support from Western countries (in their own interests) was important for the change of power. The social base for Maidan gathered various social groups defined more regionally than along class lines.

One could find many ‘lumpens’ and ‘criminals’ on the Maidan Square; it was actually one of the pretexts for dispersing the Maidan protest camp in Kiev in August 2014. And if former law enforcement and military personnel as well as international volunteers were not present in such high numbers as in the Donbass militia groups, the real question was whether the left could support Ukrainian law-enforcement, army and volunteer battalions in their Anti-Terrorist Operation against the separatist rebels starting from April 2014. Anti-Maidan protests with their Russian nationalist and separatist dimension were indeed ‘rocking the boat’ of the new and still weak post-Maidan government, lacking legitimacy among a large part of the population and challenged by a powerful neighbour, and it obviously shared responsibility for the following civil war. However, the Maidan protests with their Ukrainian nationalist dimension and violence, strongly skewed in terms of their social base towards Western provinces, added to the fragility of the Ukrainian state and the regional split. Nevertheless, they were supported by its liberal-left wing for the higher goals of anti-police resistance and progressive ‘European values’. What followed was typical doublethink, a ‘this-is-a-completely-different-thing!’ way of argumentation in relation to Anti-Maidan, which did not deserve any even critical support from the pro-Maidan left.

This does not mean that one should consider Anti-Maidan as just a mirror image of Maidan, only with a mechanical substitution of its components: for example, Russia for Europe and Russian far-right nationalists for Ukrainian far-right nationalists. However, one could expect from the left to at least show awareness of complex mixtures of reactionary and progressive elements in *both* movements. Instead, a large part of the pro-Maidan left rejected any progressive elements within Anti-Maidan, denying any just reasons to protest against the new neoliberal-nationalist government and the danger of the Ukrainian far right. Even socio-economic grievances, that Anti-Maidan activists raised more openly than Maidan protesters (anticipating the economic problems of European association and a break with Russia, the deterioration of industry, infrastructure, education and healthcare) [9, pp. 94-95], were usually disregarded by the pro-Maidan left as allegedly having nothing to solidarise with.

AWU activists emerged as the strongest voice on the left of what one could call ‘anti-Anti-Maidan’. For example, anarchist blogger Alexander Volodarsky (permanently resident in Germany but publicly working in the Russian-language media-sphere) mocked separatist criticism of oligarchs, demands for nationalisation of industries and a declarative ban on labour exploitation in documents produced by the short-lived Kharkov People’s Republic as not radical and anti-capitalist enough, comparing them with the NSDAP programme [86]. Needless to say, he had never employed this kind of ultra-radical criticism against the even less salient social demands of Maidan. Instead, he was counterposing Maidan and Anti-Maidan in a typically orientalist way:

If the majority of Maidan protesters had spontaneous aspirations for freedom, mistrust of politicians, a kind of unreflected 'raw' anarchism, in Anti-Maidan all social protest potential flowed into a reactionary channel – the slaves demanded a harder lash and shackles.

At least Maidan naively desired a European carrot. Anti-Maidan hysterically demands a Eurasian stick. [87]

Some known AWU activists were openly and consciously repeating popular dehumanising hate speech clichés against Anti-Maidan supporters (*kolorady* or *vatniki*²³). However, for some others among the pro-Maidan left, it went beyond just implicit cultural elitism and social racism towards elements of Anti-Maidan termed 'lumpens', 'gangsters' and 'declassed' [81]. For example, Serhii Kutnii from the AWU justified the massacre of Odessa Anti-Maidan protesters on May 2 as a necessary sacrifice to prevent more bloodshed such as in Donbass, thus consciously legitimating the preventive mass murder of Anti-Maidan activists [88]. This was only one example of the most extreme and openly expressed chauvinist statements but many among the pro-Maidan left at least initially supported the Anti-Terrorist Operation started by the Kiev government against separatist rebels, and they initially criticised it merely for its inefficiency, not for its nature as a repressive operation to suppress revolt against the new government [89, 90, 91].

Why did it happen that the left objectively sided with the new Ukrainian neoliberal-nationalist government against the separatist rebels and chose its 'own' camp in the nationalist and imperialist conflict? Some causes were specific to the political conjuncture and dynamics in Ukraine in spring of 2014, but some reflect a much deeper crisis of the international left.

Starting with the more specific reasons, the new left groups comprising the core of the pro-Maidan left did not have strong organisations in almost all major centres of Anti-Maidan mobilisation. Unlike in Kiev, which was the unchallenged centre of the new left, as explained in previous chapters, their activity in south-eastern Ukrainian provinces, especially in Donbass, was far more minor. The Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists in Donetsk, once important and relatively strong in the 1990s, had already disintegrated by the start of Maidan [92]. For many pro-Maidan left groups there was simply no capacity for effective organisational participation in Anti-Maidan protests. The only exception was the Kharkov AWU which, however, had already been strongly involved in the Maidan protests and continued participating there after the overthrow of Yanukovich. Besides, a quickly

²³ *Kolorady* means Colorado beetles, insects that eat potatoes and tomatoes, of which almost every Ukrainian is aware. They typically have black and orange stripes on their back, similar to the St. George's ribbon used as a symbol of victory in the Great Patriotic War waged by the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany and later used as an "antifascist" symbol by pro-Russian separatists. Comparing separatist supporters with these parasitic insects was a way to dehumanise the enemy and legitimate mass violence, analogous to hate speech involving "cockroaches" used during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. *Vatnik* means a quilted jacket that was stereotypically worn by Soviet workers, peasants, soldiers, prisoners and is a pejorative term for a person with a "Soviet", "reactionary", anti-liberal and rigid "mentality".

developing confrontation between Maidan and Anti-Maidan protesters made any sympathies for Anti-Maidan not only politically but also emotionally very difficult. For example, Kharkov anarchists were beaten by Anti-Maidan protesters together with other Maidan supporters in a few episodes of violence [93].

The enmity towards Anti-Maidan was also at least partially connected to the material interests of many of the new left themselves, determined by their socio-economic status. For creative workers (over-represented among the new left), frequently NGO employees working on grant projects supported by Western foundations, a switch of their cities to Russian or pro-Russian separatist control could almost certainly mean losing their jobs, the end of their usual lifestyle and limits on freedom of expression. These fears were not groundless. On May 17, 2014 a Crimean antifascist, Alexander Kolchenko, was arrested by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) as part of a group accused of membership in the Right Sector and of preparing terrorist attacks. A possible reason was his participation in the protests against the Russian annexation of Crimea [94]. In August 2014 Kolchenko and a movie director, Oleg Sentsov, were sentenced to 10 and 20 years of imprisonment respectively – an outrageously severe punishment considering the lack of evidence. Solidarity with Kolchenko became one of the most important campaigns for the pro-Maidan new left, usually accompanied by total silence about the left victims of political repression in Ukraine [95]. Too many of the pro-Maidan left expressed no solidarity with economic grievances, with Anti-Maidan protesters' fears of the far-right threat, and hopes for higher wages and pensions in Russia, which were obviously important for the working classes. Even cautious support for Anti-Maidan would also mean a critical break with the dominant neoliberal-nationalist ideology in Kiev and other western-central provinces in an atmosphere of patriotic hysteria after the snipers' massacre of Maidan protesters on February 20 and the annexation of Crimea. The break would not necessarily mean formal repression but would almost certainly lead to informal pressure and ostracism in job- or education-related, activist and friendship networks. It would simply require more courage and commitment, which the pro-Maidan left appeared not to have.

Finally, there were ideological reasons that have wider significance outside Ukraine. They are connected with post-Soviet vulgar Marxism, usually ignorant about many important developments in 20th century Western Marxist thought. They are also connected with the anti-communism of the libertarian and liberal left, especially intense during patriotic hysteria in a post-Soviet society where the mistakes and crimes of the Soviet government had direct influence on people's lives and memories. The last but not least important source comes from postmodernist attacks on class-centric politics, degrading the left into a radical liberal wing of Western imperialism and neoliberalism. I will discuss these sources in more detail in the next chapter, as the major texts making these ideological presuppositions explicit appeared mainly after the end of the Anti-Maidan mobilisation and in the context of the full-scale war in Donbass.

However, some of the pro-Maidan left tried to resist a one-sided alignment with the Maidan camp. That part of the pro-Maidan left which had participated in Maidan protests more from populist motives (not to ignore the mass movement) while understanding the limits of Maidan were also trying to support at least some of the progressive elements of the Anti-Maidan movement as well. As Zakhar Popovych, a Left Opposition activist, said:

The Left Opposition's position was that we must not fully take the side of either Maidan, or Anti-Maidan. Instead, we had to look for ways to establish solidarity and interaction between left libertarian components that Anti-Maidan, to some extent, had as well. In my opinion, Anti-Maidan had them much less [than Maidan] but it did have some and we made such attempts. [60, p. 111]

The LO even investigated the possibility of political intervention in the Anti-Maidan protests, including in Slavyansk, where the armed revolt started. As Nina Potarska said in her interview, the 10-point programme of radical socio-economic reforms that they wrote for Maidan protesters [62] was greeted 'everywhere':

In the East people support all the points except dissolving Berkut [the riot police], as they perceived them as defenders from the 'fascist junta'. However, these very people speaking about the same problems everywhere are now putting on different ribbons and starting to kill each other [96].

This position later made it easier to take an anti-war stance and to try to articulate an independent class politics. Nevertheless, the attempts to find common ground with Anti-Maidan by some groups from the pro-Maidan left did not have practical consequences, most probably because of their organisational weakness. Ignoring the Anti-Maidan movement for various reasons, the pro-Maidan left simultaneously remained very marginal in the protest activity during that period, generally meeting the same fate as Borotba during Maidan. In some cities, most importantly in Kharkov, the left continued to participate in the Maidan movement while it was gradually waning away or transforming into purely patriotic pro-Ukrainian mobilisations and leading to no significant political achievements for the left, as explained in the previous chapter. Overall, there are only six records of pro-Maidan left participation in CSLR protest event data from the end of Maidan until the end of April 2014, which in almost all cases refer to local socio-economic protests. There were also 20 protests with the participation of the left-nationalist Autonomous Resistance mostly about local social problems and against corrupt officials of the Yanukovych regime. Concentration on local campaigns against wage arrears, sometimes even working with new, allegedly more progressive officials, or leaving active politics altogether, were different ways for the left to bury their heads in the sand while the country was descending into civil war.

WHY DID THE LEFT SUPPORT ANTI-MAIDAN?

Quite expectedly, all major anti-Maidan left organisations refused to accept what happened during the last days of Maidan after February 18 and were definitively opposed to the post-Maidan government. Nevertheless, there were some important variations.

For example, the PSPU leaders considered Maidan a ‘Nazi coup d’état’ from the very beginning and already in December 2013 were warning – as it later seemed, partially prophetically, partially hysterically – about the ‘destruction of the country, ethnic cleansing, and physical violence against political opponents’ [97]. By the time the Maidan protests culminated, they were obviously only more convinced they had been right: that what was happening was a ‘neo-Nazi coup d’état’ establishing ‘a Nazi dictatorship’. The PSPU blamed the bloodshed in Kiev city centre only on Maidan militants, ‘terrorists’, their organisers and EU and US leaders, but did not say a single critical word against the Yanukovich government or the riot police [98].

The CPU, however, blamed both sides of the confrontation for the ‘fratricidal bloodshed’: ‘those who for 22 years of the rule of the oligarchic clans brought the people to the edge of their patience, and those who deliberately lead people today to their death’ [99]. On February 22, the CPU parliamentary group voted together with pro-Maidan parties on crucial decisions to depose Viktor Yanukovich as the president and to restore the Constitution of 2004, changing the balance of power in favour of the parliament²⁴ [100]. The next day, Petro Symonenko appealed to party members with an assessment of the current political situation, calling Maidan a coup d’état exploiting people’s just grievances. According to Symonenko, it united various political forces, including the far right, with the support of the West, in order to lead Ukraine to dependency on Western institutions, the impoverishment of the population, anti-communist hysteria, together with repression and ‘physical terror’ against communists [101]. This assessment of the consequences of Maidan was quite exact, though not exhaustive. It is only after the Russian annexation of Crimea started that one could read anything resembling the ‘fascist junta’ clichés in official CPU documents and CPU leaders’ statements [102]. It is possible that during the first week the CPU was disoriented by events and undecided about its position and strategy towards the new government. The change of rhetoric might have reflected growing repression against the CPU, including decisions to ban its activity in a number of western Ukrainian regions, the attack on the central CPU office in Kiev by the far right, mass attacks against Soviet monuments, and a draft decree suggested to the parliament to cancel the registration of the Communist Party [103]. However, it also strongly resembled the main motif of Russian propaganda about a ‘fascist coup’ in Ukraine that was used to legitimate the annexation of Crimea. In any event, the

²⁴ However, the votes of those CPU MPs did not play a crucial role and the decisions would have been supported even if the CPU had voted against them, as by that moment a large number of Party of Regions MPs had joined the opposition camp.

concept of the 'national-fascist regime' was strongly present in CPU rhetoric from March. In a speech to the 48th CPU congress on March 25, Symonenko gave an extended definition of the 'national-fascist regime' as reflecting the interests of the most reactionary and aggressive groups of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, taking explicitly dictatorial forms, based on extreme nationalism and anti-communism, looking for a base among the petty bourgeoisie, covering itself with pseudosocialist rhetoric and, finally, subjugating Ukraine to the West [104]. It explicitly put the Ukrainian regime in the same category as Hitler's Germany, while the title of the talk, 'Arise, great country!' (*Vstavai, strana ogromnaia!*), quoted a popular song from the Great Patriotic War with the Nazis. The party statement adopted at the same congress said that the most reactionary, right-wing nationalist, pro-Western forces exploited the just grievances against Viktor Yanukovich and established 'a regime of a cruel, terrorist dictatorship of the neo-Nazi type' [105].

Analysis of the results of Maidan in terms of a 'coup' bringing to power a 'fascist' or even 'Nazi' 'junta' in Ukraine was not only an inaccurate depiction of reality, exploiting very loose historical analogies with the 1930s, exaggerating the extreme right-wing nature of the regime, wildly inflating the term 'fascism', and neglecting the overtly neoliberal rather than social-populist agenda of the Ukrainian government and the fact that Hitler waged wars in the imperialist interests of Germany, not to subjugate it to England, France or the US. At that specific moment, this analysis also had obvious political implications that were harmful for peace and socialist politics in Ukraine. If taken seriously, this presented the struggle between competing nationalisms and imperialisms within Maidan and Anti-Maidan in black and white terms, while in reality both movements were complex mixes of progressive and reactionary elements. The rhetoric of an 'anti-fascist' struggle against the 'fascist' junta justified not only a strong position in support of Anti-Maidan but also an armed struggle against the new government, whatever dubious allies (both domestic and foreign) that might have involved.

Indeed, the CPU and the PSPU presented the Anti-Maidan movement without any complexity, never mentioning the strong participation of Russian nationalists. In contrast to the previous CPU analysis of Maidan as a struggle between competing oligarchic clans, they never applied this analysis to the Anti-Maidan protests. They never mentioned any possibility that the former Party of Regions elites might have exploited them in order to win some concessions from the new post-Maidan government. It is particularly telling that their understanding of the issues of the Anti-Maidan movement was limited to the issues of federalisation or autonomy for south-eastern Ukrainian regions and Russian language rights, without any emphasis on or even mention of the socio-economic grievances behind these protests. For example, this is how Symonenko described Anti-Maidan demands in his appeal on May Day:

We will support the just demands of the citizens of Ukraine from the east and the south: on local referenda, on the status of the Russian language as the

second state language, on federalisation as the foundation to extend the rights of territorial communities, on the necessity of organising an all-Ukrainian referendum on joining the Customs Union [with Russia] and others [106].

The PSPU was predictably even more nationalist in their rhetoric, often becoming completely hysterical in their statements. For example, they seriously spoke of the genocide of ethnic Russians or even of the entire Russian-speaking population in Ukraine (roughly half of the country) that the Ukrainian 'neo-Nazi government' planned to eliminate with nuclear weapons (renounced by Ukraine since 1996) [107].

Neither the PSPU, nor the CPU central leadership ever criticised Russian government actions or mentioned the presence of Russian forces in Crimea or Russian support for the separatist revolt in Donbass. They expressed full understanding of the Crimean referendum to join Russia as self-defence against the 'neo-Nazi ideology and coup d'état', as is proclaimed in the statement of the Front of People's Resistance to Eurocolonisation organised by the PSPU with marginal Stalinist and Russian nationalist parties and organisations [108]. Georgiy Kriuchkov from the CPU Central Committee expressed essentially the same position in solidarity with the will of the Crimean people 'unambiguously expressed in the great excitement' about the referendum [109]. Petro Symonenko, though more careful, blamed exclusively Ukrainian nationalism and the 'irresponsible policies of the national-fascist regime' for the loss of Crimea [104].

However, despite very strong rhetoric against the new government, the CPU and the PSPU leadership showed no signs of real radicalism. While strongly criticising the Ukrainian regime as 'national-fascist' and comparing it with Nazi Germany, the CPU decided to participate in the presidential elections. It is possible that they hoped to acquire a significant part of the former Viktor Yanukovych electorate in the south-eastern provinces. However, in the end a larger proportion of these people did not participate in the elections at all (consciously abstaining or being unable to participate in Crimea and the separatist-controlled areas) instead of supporting various 'south-eastern' candidates. Petro Symonenko withdrew from the elections only in the middle of May, referring to requests from local CPU cells and saying that it was impossible to have free and fair elections in a country torn apart by military conflict, while attacks against CPU members and agitators were also increasing [110]²⁵. Both the CPU and even the PSPU leadership consistently avoided giving open support to the separatist Donetsk and Lugansk 'people's republics' and to their referenda for independence from Ukraine in May, resisting sympathies from the rank-and-file membership, especially in eastern and southern regions, while many local CPU and PSPU activists in Donbass were actually helping separatist militias and referenda. In the spring of 2014 the CPU published a couple of carefully written statements confirming that it respected Ukrainian territorial integrity and did not participate in public disorder or

²⁵ Nevertheless, Petro Symonenko withdrew too late from the elections, so his name was still on the ballots and he still got 1.51 per cent of votes.

unlawful activities [111, 112]. Even if a 'national-fascist' regime had been established in Ukraine, the CPU leadership, well integrated into the Ukrainian elite for many years, was obviously not ready to lead the 'anti-fascist' resistance which would imply serious risks for them and their property. The PSPU leadership together with their Front of People's Resistance to Eurocolonisation, meanwhile, were writing feverish appeals to the United Nations, the European Union and the USA to intervene against the Ukrainian government to stop 'neo-Nazi repressions and pogroms' [113]; to Russia, China, and India to deploy peace-keeping forces [114]; and even to the former president, Yanukovych, as if he had any legitimacy and power in Ukraine [115].

Borotba took a significantly different position regarding the Anti-Maidan protests. Paradoxically, it was both more attentive to internal differences within Anti-Maidan but also more ready to support it openly, including its separatist developments. In the last days of the Maidan revolt, like the CPU, Borotba tried to distance itself from both sides of the violence, calling on people not to die in the 'oligarchic wars' [116]. However, as early as 25 February, Borotba announced the foundation of the Centre of Anti-Fascist Resistance calling for protest mobilisations and propaganda against the new government and the Ukrainian far right, but also for membership in 'self-defence' structures [117]. Like the CPU, Borotba authors often used terms like 'fascism' to refer to the post-Maidan government, or they at least warned of such a threat [118]. The term 'junta' probably appeared even more frequently in Borotba statements. They justified it as a 'popular term' among Anti-Maidan protesters that well described Ukrainian reality and did not simply come from Russian propaganda [119, p. 121]. However, Borotba had a more sophisticated understanding of fascism than frantic comparisons with Nazi Germany by the CPU and the PSPU. It usually compared the Ukrainian post-Maidan regime with pro-American dictatorships in the Third World that enforced harsh neoliberal policies by means of military and paramilitary terror [120].

Unlike the CPU and the PSPU, that were limiting Anti-Maidan and the subsequent separatist revolt to a self-determination agenda among the Russian-speaking population, Borotba emphasised a strong 'anti-capitalist' wing in the Anti-Maidan protests [121]. One should not take the term 'anti-capitalist' at face value, as there were hardly any anti-capitalists in Anti-Maidan except Borotba themselves and some even more marginal radical left activists. Rather, it reflected a wish to articulate protesters' anti-oligarchic sentiments and socio-economic grievances more clearly, but also to legitimate Anti-Maidan for an international left-wing audience. One should understand the frequent appeals to participation of the working class in the same way [119, p. 117, 122, 123], though it seems that Borotba had never presented Anti-Maidan as a 'genuine workers revolution' as, for example, Boris Kagarlitsky had done [124]. In reality, both anti-capitalist and working class identities described the Anti-Maidan protests much less accurately than the identity based on the 'Soviet people' or 'Soviet patriots', or 'Soviet conservatives', which Borotba activists frequently mentioned themselves [119, p. 116, 122, 125]. The 'Soviet people' was a political

nation-project supposed to transcend Russian, Ukrainian and other nationalities of the USSR and this identity was still much stronger in Donbass than in other Ukrainian regions and was clearly different from a narrow ethnic Russian or Russian-speaking identity that Russian nationalists were trying to appeal to. In any case, a more sophisticated analysis of Anti-Maidan by Borotba indeed contained criticism against its Russian nationalist wing, completely absent in the rhetoric of the CPU and PSPU leadership. Borotba repeatedly stated that they opposed any type of nationalism – Russian and Ukrainian – and that the influence of Russian nationalism in Anti-Maidan was harmful for the movement [118, 126, 127]. Borotba also clearly stated that they opposed any intrusion of foreign powers, including Russia, into the Ukrainian conflict, though they were taking an ‘understanding’ position towards the Crimean referendum as well as blaming primarily Ukrainian nationalists and the Kiev government for the loss of Crimea [128, 127].

Nevertheless, Borotba criticism of Russian nationalism was not consistent. Mirroring (left-)liberal supporters of Maidan, they often downplayed Russian nationalist participation in Anti-Maidan protests, sometimes exaggerating the influence of the ‘anti-capitalist’ wing [129]. For example, in an interview published as late as 12 May, i.e. long after Russian nationalist militias had taken the initiative in the Donbass revolt and even after referenda on separation from Ukraine had taken place in Donetsk and Lugansk, Borotba leader Serhiy Kyrychuk said:

Russian nationalists indeed participated in these [Anti-Maidan] protests but there were only a few of them. Moreover, the difference between nationalist participation in the protests in the south-east and in Maidan was that the nationalists had never been able to impose their agenda either in Kharkov, or in Odessa, or even in Donbass. [121]

As the pro-Maidan left had never broken with Ukrainian nationalists during Maidan, Borotba had never broken with Russian nationalists. Even worse, when responding to accusations from their side they confirmed that

Borotba stands for the unity of protest forces. We are confronting the junta supported by the richest oligarchs in the country and Western imperialism. In this confrontation the unity and cooperation of all organisations and all protest leaders are extremely important [130].

Unlike the CPU and PSPU leadership, Borotba spoke more openly in defence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics. Probably only part of the organisation fully supported separatist entities despite the previous demands made by Borotba for federalisation without breaking away from Ukraine [126]. However, even in the organisation’s statements, the separatist republics were openly defended as ‘the will of the people of the south-eastern provinces’ [130]. They did not have illusions about the socialist nature of the emerging states; nevertheless, they believed that ‘founding people’s republics “from below”, the experience of mass antifascist, anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic struggle will undoubtedly move not only Ukraine’s south-east but

the whole post-Soviet space “to the left” ’ [131]. They hoped that the very logic of their struggle would objectively move the separatist republics into the anticapitalist camp – a hope that is still proving to be futile [132].

There is no question why this part of the left supported Anti-Maidan mobilisations. One does not need conspiracy theories about Russian money, which are quite popular among Ukrainian liberals and some of the pro-Maidan left. Anti-Maidan was not a proletarian anti-capitalist movement, but the threat was real. Even if the assessment of the post-Maidan regime as national-fascist was wrong, it was still openly anti-communist and indulging anti-communist violence from far-right groups. The Anti-Maidan movement, besides any probable Russian and Party of Regions impact, had a strong grassroots component and presented a good opportunity for left political intervention because it lacked anti-communist attitudes (unlike Maidan) and strong political leadership before the start of the armed revolt. Recall also the hopes of the pro-Maidan left for the modernisation of Ukrainian society. The ‘Soviet patriotism’ to which Borotba activists appealed could be seen as defending another modernisation project – the Soviet one – against the fascist, imperialist and neoliberal threat of de-modernisation. The problem was obviously that this modernisation project was turned backwards and was essentially conservative, not providing a model for societal development.

In sum, there were plenty of political and ideological reasons to support and join Anti-Maidan, which were at least as understandable and rational as those which motivated the pro-Maidan left to support the opposing movement. The real problem was explicit blindness to, or at least downplaying or justification of, Russian nationalism in the movement and Russian government interest in initiating and sustaining the conflict.

One of the lines of left-wing criticism of the Soviet Union pointed out that when hopes for world revolution waned in the 1920s, the Soviet Communists increasingly tied the interests of the revolution and the world proletariat to the interests of the Soviet state competing in global politics with other states, primarily with the USA after the Second World War. Communism became almost indistinguishable from Soviet patriotism. At the same time, the Soviet Union itself was gradually becoming less and less a symbol for revolutionaries from other countries, both because of internal problems with slowing economic development and a lack of political freedom and because of dubious external actions like suppressing the Prague Spring in 1968. However, the crucial break happened after the collapse of the USSR and when new post-Soviet Russian capitalism, not progressive but regressive for Russian society, was emerging. It tried to benefit from the legacy of Soviet global power, striving to retain its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet neighbourhood, while at the same time aspiring to an equal place among imperialist powers. At this point many Soviet/pro-Soviet communists appeared attached to defending the interests of the Russian state which had radically changed its class nature since Soviet times. In Ukraine, for example, the old left had to shift to a purely conservative and nationalist rhetoric of ‘civilisational

proximity' implying an almost naturally determined close alliance between the Ukrainian and Russian 'fraternal nations'. It also meant deafness to the Ukrainian national question, an inability to recognise real problems that Russian historical domination had produced and that some Soviet policies like 'Russification' had continued, and usually very hostile attitudes to even moderate expressions of Ukrainian nationalism. A specific kind of 'anti-imperialism' became more common among the Western left, directed primarily against US dominance and seemingly sympathetic to tactical alliances with anti-American politicians, ignoring their reactionary policies. In the next chapter I will return to this problem in more detail, showing how this type of 'anti-imperialism' was pushing some of the Ukrainian left to openly support the separatist DPR/LPR while at the same time sharing some astonishingly common features with the opposing justification of the progressiveness of the Ukrainian side in the war. In both cases the problem was the oblivion to class analysis and class politics, allowing the left to degrade either into a conservative wing of emerging Russian imperialism or into a liberal wing of the imperialism of Western powers.

HOW DID THE LEFT TAKE PART IN THE ANTI-MAIDAN PROTESTS?

The left Anti-Maidan was a much more significant phenomenon than the left Maidan. As mentioned before, according to preliminary CSLR protest event data, left participation in Maidan was reported in only 20 protest events, less than one per cent of all Maidan protests. On the contrary, left participation in Anti-Maidan was reported in at least 172 protests, i.e. 19% of 887 Anti-Maidan protests during the period between 21 February (the day when Yanukovich left Kiev) and 30 April 2014²⁶.

Among left Anti-Maidan protests, the CPU was reported in 119 events, Borotba in 41 events, and the PSPU in 30 events. Almost all reported protest activity of these organisations during the period before the end of April was connected to Anti-Maidan. However, the left was not the most active and visible political group in Anti-Maidan, as the participation of various Russian nationalist groups and organisations was still much higher – they were reported in almost half (47%) of Anti-Maidan protests.

²⁶ CSLR team is still checking the data between May and July 2014, so they are not included here. Defining Anti-Maidan is a separate and difficult methodological question, considering the diversity of the demands usually associated with the movement and the interpenetration of Anti-Maidan protests with repressions against Maidan and with the Russian special operation to annex Crimea. For the present purposes, it is enough to say that specific protest events were included in the Anti-Maidan category following a combination of criteria involving identity, issues, and targets excluding repressive actions against Maidan supporters by the state and law-enforcement personnel and excluding events with reported participation of Russian "little green men".

Figure 2. Major participants of Anti-Maidan protests for 7-days intervals, number of protest events

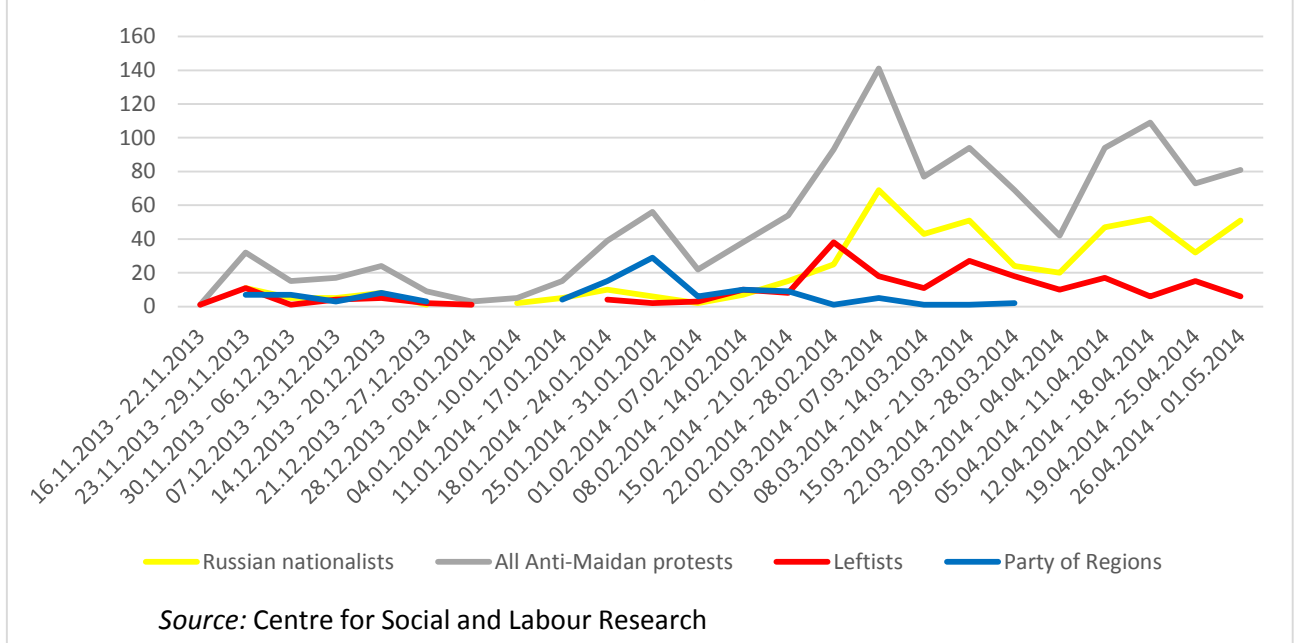


Figure 2 depicts changes in the reported participation of the major Anti-Maidan political forces (including data for Anti-Maidan mobilisations before the overthrow of Yanukovich). The peak of leftist Anti-Maidan visibility was in late February, during the week immediately after Yanukovich fled from Kiev. At that moment, the attention of Maidan activists switched to south-eastern Ukrainian regions with the aim of expanding Maidan there and deposing local authorities from the pro-Yanukovich Party of Regions. They also frequently attacked Lenin monuments that were still standing in many south-eastern cities and towns from the time of the USSR, unlike in western Ukraine. Leftist (mostly CPU) participation in late February was the most visible, precisely in terms of mobilisations in defence of Soviet monuments in different cities. Later, the visibility of the left in Anti-Maidan protests gradually declined, especially after the armed separatist insurrection started in April 2014.

Here it is important to understand precisely what the figures derived from the protest event data mean. This is participation in protest events as reported by Ukrainian media. It does not mean that the left did not participate in the other 81% of Anti-Maidan protests. Their participation might have gone unnoticed or unrecognised by the media; they may be covered by some general description like 'Anti-Maidan activists', 'pro-Russian protesters', 'separatists', etc.; the media could also deliberately misrepresent participants (especially as Anti-Maidan was a very sensitive topic in the information war with Russia). Some agents could also strategically hide their identity, for example during violent or other illegal events that might lead to a clampdown.

In general, journalists easily recognise the old, familiar parties like the CPU and PSPU; it might have been a different story for the younger and smaller Borotba. However, left participation in Anti-Maidan (as in Maidan as well) could be wider than

mentioned. Besides, the figures do not account for the diversity of forms of participation: from appearing as a small group with party symbols on the margins of a mass rally to organising and leading demonstrations. Nevertheless, despite all biases related to media reporting, the real participation parameters of the protest groups determine the visibility rate as well. The more leading positions the group has in the protest, the more organised it is, the more numerically dominant, the more involved in sensational (for example, violent) activities attracting media attention, etc., the more visible it will be to the media.

Compared to Maidan, the left in the Anti-Maidan protests was more significant, not only in terms of the number of protests in which it participated and its visibility to the media but also in its qualitatively different role and influence and the nature of its participation. As Taras Salamanyuk noted in his analysis of the left in regional Maidan and Anti-Maidan protests, 'contrary to the left in Maidan, Borotba demands were indeed taken more seriously because of its prominent position in the Kharkov Maidan. It was not a sporadic distribution of leaflets or organising an agitation group, but purposeful and regular propaganda of left messages from the stage' [51, p. 130]. Borotba reported some dozens of thousands of leaflets distributed, regularly sending thousands of text messages calling on recipients to join the rallies and providing the car serving as the stage for the rallies [133]. The Borotba office in Kharkov was used to coordinate Anti-Maidan rallies [119, p. 117]. In Odessa, the local Anti-Maidan protesters nominated Oleksii Albu from Borotba as a candidate for city mayor [134] (he later withdrew his nomination after the 2 May tragedy [135]). Even if they were far from winning hegemony within Anti-Maidan, the left was among the key organisers of rallies, at least in several important cities, and definitely had more opportunities to compete for leadership than did the left in the Maidan protests.

This was possible not primarily because of the stronger predisposition of the mass of Anti-Maidan supporters to anticapitalist ideas (there is still no systematic analysis of the Anti-Maidan social base and attitudes, although activists would certainly speak of the predominance of workers or at least of 'Soviet people' [119, pp. 116-117]). There was not a pro-left disposition but rather a lack of anti-communist attitudes, and political competitors with the left were weak. Unlike the case of Maidan, where three major opposition parties were unchallenged political representatives of the movement, within the Anti-Maidan demonstrations, the Party of Regions had almost fully curtailed its public presence by the end of March, as seen in Figure 2²⁷. Russian nationalists, though even more active and visible at Anti-Maidan protest events than the left, initially came to Anti-Maidan in an even weaker and more marginal state, as a diverse array of small political organisations and parties not at all comparable to the

²⁷ This does not mean that the Party of Regions and its local officials did not play any covert role in instigating and escalating Anti-Maidan protests, though there is still no credible systematic and well-founded analysis of this. The best journalistic accounts suggest that even its covert role may be greatly exaggerated by Maidan supporters [286].

strength of the Ukrainian nationalist far right or even to the CPU²⁸. It was precisely probable external support from Russia, inspiration from the annexation of Crimea, which provided a blueprint and a hope, and Igor Strelkov’s armed insurrection initiative in Slavyansk in April 2014 that made them the leaders of the protests. Summing up, even weak and little-known left organisations with low nationwide support like Borotba had much less competition in Anti-Maidan. Besides, the Anti-Maidan CPU, PSPU, and Borotba themselves were among the strongest organisations among the left in general – at least, stronger than any average new left pro-Maidan initiative.

But where exactly did the left have the strongest position? According to CSLR data, the centres of the left Anti-Maidan were in Kharkov (left participation reported in 46 protests, 46% of Anti-Maidan protests in the city), Nikolayev (30; 42%), Dnepropetrovsk (17; 61%), and Odessa (14; 19%). However, the biggest number of Anti-Maidan protests took place in Donetsk, where leftist participation was reported in only nine cases. In Lugansk, the left was reported in only five Anti-Maidan protests.

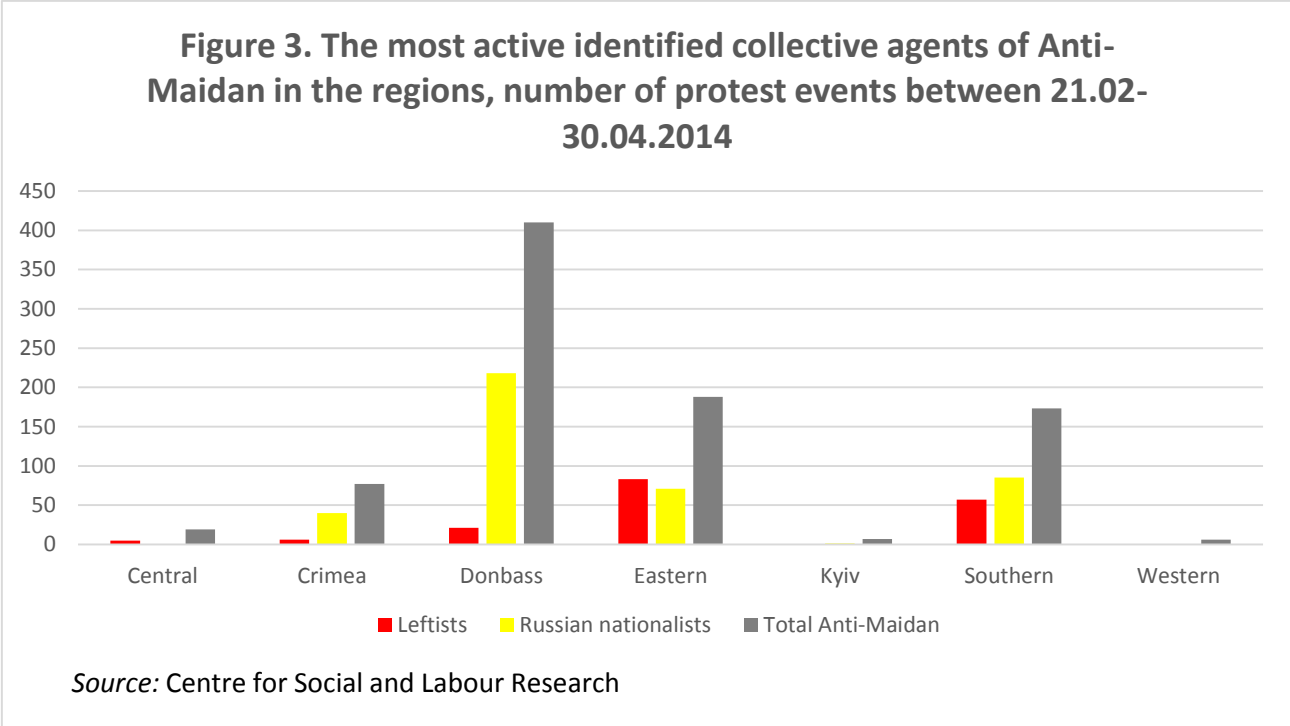


Figure 3 summarises the participation of the left and Russian nationalists in Anti-Maidan protests across the Ukrainian regions. In Donbass – the epicentre of the armed separatist rebellion – the left was much less visible. The same is true for the Crimean ‘Russian Spring’ where the left was only marginally reported. Nevertheless, in the southern and eastern provinces, except Donbass and Crimea, the left was almost as visible or even more visible than Russian nationalists in Anti-Maidan protests. However, these were the regions where the new Ukrainian government was able to consolidate its control in April and May and suppress the local Anti-Maidans,

²⁸ According to CSLR protest event data, Russian nationalist participation was mentioned in only 2% of Ukrainian protest events before Anti-Maidan started, compared to 20% where the Ukrainian far right was mentioned before Maidan started.

which could not expand the armed insurrection in Donbass. Therefore, the stronger position of the left in mass rallies in Kharkov or in Odessa was not very significant in the completely different dynamic compared to the separatist insurrection, supported by Russia and requiring skills and resources different to mass protest campaigns.

Collecting data on left participation in overtly separatist activities is a difficult task in the context of Ukrainian law-enforcement crackdowns. After the start of the war both pro-Ukrainian and pro-separatist online personal databases appeared, collecting information on the combatants and public supporters of the opposing side (with the obvious aim of providing information for subsequent repression or even lynching). Searching pro-Ukrainian databases for any information connected to members of left-wing parties and organisations may give some information on the left which, in different ways, supported separatist activities. The problems with these databases are that they are obviously incomplete; statements about illegal activities are not always supported with evidence; the information may be included precisely in order to slander a certain person or to discredit a certain organisation. It is obvious that people who hope to pursue any public activity on Ukrainian territory would deny any such allegations.

Nevertheless, searching the most publicised online database on separatists and their supporters²⁹ for members of the CPU, PSPU, and Borotba, I found more than 50 people from Donetsk and Lugansk provinces mentioned in relation to separatist activities or with openly pro-separatist positions. Only those cases are included here where at least some evidence (such as documents, links to media stories, pictures, screenshots from online discussions, etc.) or detailed descriptions of activities are available. Almost all of them were members or elected officials from the CPU, with only a few people from the PSPU and Borotba. Of course, the data is in no way representative. However, it shows that at least some leaders of local CPU cells, members of the province- and city-level councils elected from the CPU, and rank-and-file activists were directly involved in organising referenda on separation from Ukraine in May 2015 or in organising financial or medical support for the separatist militia. Some are claimed to be directly involved in capturing state buildings and/or joining the militia. A number of former CPU members of local councils became members of the parliaments of the ‘people’s republics’ – Lugansk and Donetsk People’s Councils – or took official positions in the emerging separatist governments. The most well-known was Boris Litvinov, formerly the leader of the Donetsk city district CPU cell and member of the city council, who became the author of the Declaration of Independence of the Donetsk People’s Republic, the administrator of the DPR Council of Ministers and then the speaker of the People’s Council (which changed in November 2014 after the first DPR elections).

²⁹ <https://psb4ukr.org/>, called “Peacekeeper” and supported by MP Anton Herashchenko, known for his repressive legislative initiatives and scandalous statements.

It is important to understand that by the start of Anti-Maidan, the CPU was the second most popular party in all south-eastern Ukrainian provinces after the Party of Regions. In the parliamentary elections of 2012, it ranged from 18.9% of votes in Donetsk province to 29.5% in Sevastopol city³⁰. The CPU had their party groups in many local councils, from village to provincial level, with local control of power in some places. The CPU leadership did not risk turning this reserve of power into full support of the separatist revolt, which remained largely the initiative of individual local officials and party cells rather than a coordinated strategy. The CPU leadership clearly kept its distance from the initiatives of Donbass communists and excluded those public figures who became part of the separatist movement from the party. When, in Lugansk, the whole CPU group in the provincial council decided to join the separatist parliament, Petro Symonenko – frightened by the obvious pro-separatist public action of high-ranking CPU officials – could only make pathetic excuses that this was merely the ‘private opinion’ of the group’s leader [136].

In general, Anti-Maidan tactic was very radical: 47% of all Anti-Maidan protest events were either confrontational or violent. The level of confrontation and violence was higher than in Maidan protests (37%). However, from the tactical point of view, the left was not a radical but a moderate wing of Anti-Maidan. Only 19% of all Anti-Maidan protests with left participation were confrontational or violent. In absolute numbers, these came to 33 events, just 8% of all confrontational and violent events in Anti-Maidan. Only 12 of these events were specifically violent in a strict understanding of the term, i.e. implying direct damage to people or property. In comparison, Russian nationalists participated in Anti-Maidan confrontations and violence six times more often (in almost half of all Anti-Maidan confrontations and violence). Almost all left confrontations and violence happened before the middle of March. Many of these events were related to defending Lenin monuments and confrontations with pro-Maidan/pro-Ukrainian supporters during mass demonstrations. It also means that when violence reached a high level of intensity in the middle of April, the participation of the left became almost invisible. It proves again that the left was largely irrelevant in the separatist revolt.

Instead the main strategy for the anti-Maidan left was participation in and organisation of peaceful rallies and marches³¹. As was mentioned before, only

³⁰ Official results of the parliamentary elections of 2012 in the multi-member district accessed via the Central Election Commission page on 19 August 2015 (<http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2012/WP320?PT001F01=900&pPlace=4>).

³¹ The participation of some Borotba activists in notorious episodes of Anti-Maidan violence became an occasion for a campaign of dissociation and condemnation against them by the pro-Maidan new left. On 1 March 2014 a huge crowd of Anti-Maidan protesters broke into the local administration building, occupied by Maidan activists, beating and publicly humiliating them. Afterwards, the leader of Borotba in Kharkov, Denis Zaitsev, proudly spoke about the participation of a Borotba ‘battle group’ which had brought the Right Sector to its knees, liberating Kharkov from ‘fascist’ [287]. Obviously, the pro-Maidan occupiers included not just Right Sector militants but also liberal activists as well, including a poet, Serhiy Zhadan, who occasionally cooperated with new left. The new left responded with a statement that they worked hard to distribute among the international left, reiterating the ‘non-transparent financing’ of Borotba, its occasional cooperation with Russian nationalists, one-sided position against Maidan and manipulation of ‘anti-fascist’ rhetoric [288]. Borotba in response condemned the violence on 1 March, both Ukrainian and Russian nationalism and

Borotba tried to articulate an anti-capitalist agenda in the protests, though even they were usually adapting the Anti-Maidan discourse, unsystematically adding socio-economic issues to the typical demands for referenda, self-government, the Russian language, etc., and often resorting to Soviet patriotism as a 'tool' to criticise 'neoliberal reforms and the general post-Soviet collapse of the economy, social sphere, marketisation which so strongly affect Soviet workers' [119, p. 121]. Though, the political impact of these propaganda activities was minor. The greatest achievement mentioned by Anti-Maidan left supporters was anti-oligarch criticism (present in the rhetoric of almost any political force in Ukraine), the priority given to collective forms of property and the 'ban' on the 'exploitation of human labour' in the declaration of the short-lived Kharkov People's Republic (a mere rhetorical move, obviously meaningless under capitalism) [137], or sporadic calls for nationalisation from separatist leaders attempting to put pressure on Ukrainian oligarchs with property in Donetsk and Lugansk provinces. According to CSLR data, the media reported socio-economic issues besides the general Anti-Maidan agenda in only 13 Anti-Maidan protests; in only two of these events was left participation mentioned. As mentioned before, ordinary Anti-Maidan protesters spoke in interviews about socio-economic grievances more openly than Maidan protesters [9, pp. 94-95]. The Ukrainian media could simply be inattentive to socio-economic demands, focusing on the more sensationalist separatist, pro-Russian agenda. However, the problem was precisely a clear and visible articulation of progressive socio-economic demands preventing the hegemony of Russian nationalism in Anti-Maidan. The left failed to solve this problem.

CSLR data provides a quantitative measure of how often the left was mentioned in the same protest events together with Russian nationalists: in at least 110 protest events, almost two thirds (64%) of all Anti-Maidan protest events with reported left participation. This means that the left appeared together with Russian nationalists more often than trying to organise independently. Of course, coming together to the

Russian intervention in Crimea, and emphasised their respect of the right to peaceful protest [289, 290]. In a separate statement published only in English for an international audience, but not in Ukrainian or Russian, they dissociated themselves from the pro-Maidan left 'backing nationalist, clerical and anti-semitic protests in Euromaidan' [291]. This marked the end of the former unity of the new left movement. Later on, AWU anarchists took the leading role in publishing more anti-Borotba statements and 'revealing' articles; the longest and the most typical of them was entitled 'From petty criminals to murderers' [20]. These kind of materials were built on amalgams of true facts about misdeeds of individual Borotba members, unsupported generalisations, rumours, speculation, and interpreting mistakes as 'criminal' intent. For example, Oleksii Albu was accused of being personally responsible for the deaths of the victims of the massacre in Odessa on 2 May because he led Anti-Maidan supporters to the Trade Union building which was then set on fire by pro-Ukrainian activists – a typical example of victim-blaming, as Albu was captured and injured himself that evening. The articles were written using intensely hateful rhetoric and signed with nicknames avoiding any responsibility for the statements (though the authors from the AWU are well-known among the Ukrainian left, particularly the Germany-based Alexander Volodarsky). The materials were translated into English and other foreign languages: when Borotba effectively stopped any public activity in Ukraine, the only audience for critical articles was the international left in solidarity with the organisation being repressed. Though Borotba claimed that the articles from the AWU were used in the security service files against arrested Borotba activists, they never provided any evidence or details of this. In general, this shows the degradation of the most extreme sections of the pro-Maidan new left into willing witch-hunters against the 'wrong' left, in favour of the new political regime.

same mass meetings did not necessarily mean more substantial and strategic cooperation. Nevertheless, even Borotba activists, the most critical of Russian nationalism among the anti-Maidan left, did not shy away from closer cooperation. For example, Oleksii Albu, together with Russian far-right nationalists, participated in the defence of the Odessa province state administration from 'Nazi' Maidan supporters on January 24 [138]. Later some Borotba activists including Andriy Brazhevskiy, murdered on May 2, joined the so-called People's Squad of Odessa (*Narodnaia druzhyna Odessy*) where the pro-Russian far right was very active [139]. After the tragedy on May 2, Oleksii Albu, as an active participant in the events and one of Odessa's Anti-Maidan leaders, escaped to Crimea where he created the Committee for the Liberation of Odessa together with Oleksandr Vasilyev from the Russian nationalist Motherland (*Rodina*) party and Dmitriy Odinov, the founder of the pro-Russian far-right Slavic Unity organisation and an organiser of regular 'Russian marches' in Odessa [140]. In Kharkov a couple of activists from Borotba participated in establishing a very short-lived 'sovereign' Kharkov People's Republic, claiming to add some of the above-mentioned rhetorical left principles to its declaration, while calling on the Russian government to maintain order during the independence referendum [141, 142]. Later, Borotba activist Denis Levin called the initiative to establish the Kharkov People's Republic a 'provocation' to push Anti-Maidan in a separatist direction [119, p. 119]. Nevertheless, as early as 3 March, in Odessa, Oleksii Albu himself brought to the provincial council a proposal for a referendum on establishing an Odessa autonomous republic within Ukraine (supported by 14 of 53 council members) [143].

Could the left not cooperate with Russian nationalists? The left did indeed have more opportunities and resources to fight for hegemony in the Anti-Maidan mass protests than the left had in Maidan, and was trying to exploit them. In the process they obviously had to co-exist with Russian nationalists in the same coalition. It was a different situation for a much more marginal pro-Maidan left which almost never even came close to leadership in the movement.

The separatist armed insurrection changed things drastically. The left was incapable of leading it – some were not ready to break with their political and economic assets in Ukraine (like the CPU leadership), some were just too small (like Borotba) – nor had experienced or prepared for armed struggle. Even if they had, they would hardly be allowed to occupy an independent and uncompromised position by the emerging warlords and their handlers from a Russian government gradually taking the insurrection and 'people's republics' under their control.

At the same time, the anti-Maidan left did not break with the dynamics of separatist armed rebellion in order to try to save the Anti-Maidan mass mobilisations, in Odessa or Kharkov at least, from suicidal alignment with the DPR and LPR initiatives. Instead some openly, if critically, supported them (Borotba), some tried to integrate into DPR and LPR structures and separatist militia in secondary and tertiary positions (parts of

the Donetsk and Lugansk CPU and PSPU and some Borotba activists), and some tried to take a position of neither open support nor open dissent (the CPU leadership). All of these routes became dead ends for international class politics and the perspectives for the anti-Maidan left in Ukraine.

RESULTS AND ALTERNATIVES

Summing up, the left was much more visible and active in Anti-Maidan than in Maidan protests; however, their impact on the overall development of the movement, especially after the armed insurrection started, was still essentially insignificant. Anti-Maidan did not turn into the 'workers' revolution' that some leftists hurried to term it; it did not even articulate a clearly progressive agenda for social change. Though driven by many socio-economic grievances against the post-Maidan neoliberal-nationalist government, Anti-Maidan developed only a nationalist, not a social alternative, with the initial support of and subject to increasing control by the Russian government, and with extremely limited political opportunities for independent left politics in the emerging 'people's republics'.

The impact on the anti-Maidan left itself was largely negative. While a relatively small and young Borotba organisation significantly increased its visibility in Ukraine, this visibility was strongly associated with the separatist movement among the mainstream Ukrainian public, thus providing more reasons for repression of activists, forcing the organisation to stop any public activity in Ukraine and go 'underground', while a number of leaders and key activists had to emigrate.

The CPU leadership's contradictory position of extreme criticism of the new Ukrainian government along with refusal to truly support the insurrection backfired on the party. They lost members in Crimea and Donbass (and generally lost some of the provinces that were most supportive of the CPU in Ukraine) while at the same time only strengthening their public image as a pro-Russian party, guilty not only of supporting Viktor Yanukovich at the most critical moments but also of supporting the separatists and the foreign aggressor. Despite all the obvious anti-communist ideological elements of the repression against the CPU, their conduct during the winter and spring of 2014 was also a factor in legitimating repression of the party in the eyes of the Ukrainian public.

After the annexation of the peninsula, Crimean communists joined the Communist Party of the Russian Federation or other minor Russian communist parties. Donbass communists who had fully supported the separatist revolt appeared mainly in secondary positions within the structure of the 'people's republics' emerging on the small territories, ravaged by war, with a collapsing economy and with an elderly population that could not leave either for 'mainland' Ukraine or for Russia.

After the start of the armed insurrection, the left did not have much choice. They could not fully support it and align with it. The CPU had political positions, a significant level of support in Donbass and considerable resources to provide in support of the

rebels. However, the CPU leadership was incapable of a serious anti-state endeavour that would be too risky to a comfortable life and property. Besides, the typical elderly profile of CPU activists was hardly suitable for armed struggle.

Another option for the anti-Maidan left was to clearly distance itself from the separatists and from any Russian connections while trying to unite progressive elements of Maidan and Anti-Maidan on the basis of clearly articulated socio-economic grievances and an agenda of radical social change in Ukraine, not breaking away from it. This option was precluded by the long ideological degradation of pro-Soviet communists, unable to express clear opposition to the Russian state and Russian nationalism, and by a strong prejudice against even moderate expressions of Ukrainian nationalism.

In the end, like the pro-Maidan left but for somewhat different reasons, the anti-Maidan left also became voluntary supporters of another right-wing movement without real opportunities to promote independent class politics, continuing their degradation into the left wing of Russian nationalists and the imperialism of Russian government.

THE UKRAINIAN LEFT AND THE WAR

As the Ukrainian government started the so-called Anti-Terrorist Operation against separatist rebels on 14 April 2014, which developed in May into a full-scale war with the use of heavy weaponry and air forces, members of the Ukrainian left had to decide on their position towards the military conflict and their possible politics. At least in terms of their declarations, most of the Ukrainian left was trying to take an anti-war position. However, they were quite different in terms of who they blamed for the start of the war and who they sympathised with. There were also those who openly supported either the Ukrainian or the separatist side, positions which hardened due to later developments. There were also left combatants on both sides, although many more on the side of the separatists than vice versa. This chapter will explain the various positions of the Ukrainian left on the war and its anti-war and pro-war activities, and will assess their impact.

ANTI-WAR POSITIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Officially, the leadership of the old left CPU and PSPU was against the war; however, they blamed the 'fratricidal war' only on the post-Maidan Ukrainian government and the United States standing behind it. The story told by their statements and texts was quite simple: the government of oligarchs and neo-Nazis came to power with the support of the US and EU and started a war against the dissenting population that did not accept Maidan and had rebelled against the fascist threat for the sake of self-determination. For Ukrainian oligarchs, the war was an attempt to divert attention from their enrichment and the social problems caused by neoliberal policies.

Ukrainian far-right nationalists wanted to homogenise Ukraine in line with 'Banderovite' ideology. For the EU, it was a continuation of the colonisation of a peripheral country while at the same time destroying the remnants of Soviet industry. For the US it was a move to subjugate a Russian government challenging American global hegemony.

As usual, the rhetoric of the PSPU was only more hysterical and condemnatory of Ukrainian and Western governments, while the CPU was slightly more moderate and responsible. The PSPU was ranting furiously: for example, it called the decision to implement an economic blockade of the separatist areas 'a politics of genocide transforming Lugansk and Donetsk provinces into a Euro-concentration camp for the physical extermination of Donbass residents who did not support the Banderisation process' [144]. Though even CPU leader Petro Symonenko incidentally used the rhetoric of 'genocide':

In Ukraine not just a war is going on. In Ukraine a genocide of people by the ruling regime is going on. A genocide initiated by the oligarchs and international capital in the fight for power, property and world markets. [145]

With all the partial truths contained in this critique of the new Ukrainian government's policies, the major flaw was obvious to everyone, and probably to the party leadership themselves – this 'anti-war' position was extremely one-sided. I failed to find one single critical statement from the CPU or PSPU leadership against the Russian government concerning the war. Likewise, they never mentioned war atrocities caused by the separatists, instead focusing on the crimes of Ukrainian forces. This statement by Petro Symonenko is illuminating:

Besides, the authorities and bourgeois mass media were able to inculcate in citizens' minds the certainty that the culprits for initiating and fuelling the war in eastern Ukraine are Putin, Russia, the Party of Regions together with the Communists supporting the 'aggressor' [146]

Needless to say, he does not even mention that, at least to some extent, such a statement was true to reality and was not just an example of Russophobia. Nevertheless, the CPU manifesto before the October 2014 parliamentary elections mentioned that Ukraine was becoming 'a pawn in the foreign geopolitical game between the USA, Europe and Russia' [147], at least somewhat critically mentioning Russian involvement.

The peace proposals based on this analysis were also simple. They can be boiled down to: immediate armistice; disbanding unofficial armed groups; direct negotiations between all conflicting parties (including the Ukrainian government and separatists); sometimes a desire for the participation of trade unions and civil society organisations in the negotiations was mentioned [148]; financial and political decentralisation that might include a federal structure for Ukraine, together with other demands usually stated by Russia including official status for the Russian language and neutral status

for Ukraine [147]. The PSPU would add one more very specific demand of deploying peace-keeping forces with Russia's participation to prevent the 'ethnic cleansing' of south-eastern Ukrainian regions [149], which would essentially mean legalising Russian support of the separatists.

At the same time both the CPU and PSPU leadership were very explicit that they did not support the DPR/LPR projects [150, 151]; the CPU consistently underlined that they supported Ukraine's federalisation only with 'firm constitutional guarantees of the integrity of the country' [151]. Nevertheless, true sympathies sometimes manifested themselves. The CPU, for some reason, published a translation from the *Morning Star* paper on 'Building solidarity with the antifascist resistance in Ukraine' (which could not be anything but the separatist movement) [152, 153]. And the PSPU leader Natalia Vitrenko was very critical of the first Minsk agreement in September 2014 that stopped the rout of Ukrainian forces after Russian army units covertly intervened to prevent the defeat of the separatists. She regretted that the rebels had been 'artificially' stopped, preventing them from taking control of the whole territory of Donetsk and Lugansk provinces and suggesting that the negotiators in Minsk had been bribed by Ukrainian oligarchs [154].

The pro-Maidan new left was not as openly one-sided. Although in April one could frequently find discussions on 'is there an alternative to the ATO?' among some left-liberal and left-libertarian activists, positing that the ATO was not ideal but that there was no alternative, organisational statements after collective discussions were critical to both sides of the war. Especially after the May 2 tragedy in Odessa, the general theme was that the left (anarchists) must support neither side in this conflict on the verge of civil war. Nevertheless, blame for the conflict was assigned primarily to Anti-Maidan and the emerging separatist 'people's republics'. In the AWU statement, they were presented as a 'criminal-fascist junta', as if the Kiev government was more progressive and almost stood above the conflict of Ukrainian and Russian fascists. They recognised the threat of the Ukrainian far right but emphasised that it was exaggerated, unlike the far-right threat from Russian nationalists. As usual, they showed no sympathies for eastern Ukraine's social grievances and legitimate reasons to revolt against a neoliberal-nationalist government [81]. The Left Opposition used even stronger words, stressing that Anti-Maidan demonstrations were much smaller than and incomparable to Maidan protests, and even descended into socially racist rhetoric when describing Anti-Maidan supporters: 'mostly local lumpen-criminal groups and older people, crazy for Soviet nostalgia, support the "Slavyansk junta" ' [155].

The best-known attempt to voice a consistent anti-war position from the new left was the famous Minsk statement [156]. In June 2014, activists from several Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian left organisations and initiatives gathered near Minsk and after two days of discussion were able to pass a common statement against the war.

From Ukraine, participants from the left-wing journal *Commons* (including the author of this paper) and close to Borotba web-magazine *Liva* attended.

The Minsk statement said that stopping the civil war in Ukraine was the most urgent task for the left. It blamed Russia, the EU and the US for exploiting this conflict in their own interests. The statement took a stand against political repression and mass violence on both sides of the conflict and in Russian-controlled Crimea as well. The participants in the meeting called for a mass and influential anti-war movement that would make the following demands:

- *We demand the government of Ukraine to immediately end the "Anti-Terrorist Operation", to withdraw troops from the territory of Donetsk and Lugansk regions, and to conclude a truce with the militias of the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic.*
- *We demand that all parties to the conflict sign a peace agreement for the complete cessation of hostilities, the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of war, and the disbanding of armed groups.*
- *We urge the Ukrainian government to dissolve the armed forces consisting of involuntarily mobilised soldiers, whose families are now organising protests in various regions of Ukraine.*
- *We demand that Russia, the EU and the US completely stop interfering in the Ukrainian conflict and do not support the participants.*
- *We demand an end to chauvinist campaigns in the Ukrainian and Russian mass media, whose use of hate speech has made them some of the main instigators of the war.*
- *We demand the adoption of a new constitution for Ukraine, elections to the authorities of Donetsk and Lugansk regions, and a real right to self-determination and self-government for Donbass and all regions of Ukraine.*

[156]

More than a hundred left-wing activists expressed support for the statement online. However, it immediately attracted harsh criticism from both pro-Ukrainian and pro-separatist sides. The critics were eager to identify implicit support either of the 'fascist junta' or of Putin and his 'terrorists', in the process demonstrating for the most part not the real deficiencies of the statement but their own pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian positions. Sometimes they used virtually identical arguments, for example by saying that the Minsk statement 'equated unequal sides'. They disagreed merely over which particular side was more powerful and bore greater responsibility for the war [157].

Nevertheless, the three most important new left organisations in Ukraine and Russia – the Russian Social Movement, the Left Opposition and Borotba expressed explicit solidarity with the statement, though with significant reservations. For example, LO criticised the demand to withdraw Ukrainian troops to the borders of Donetsk and Lugansk provinces leaving for the DPR and LPR to occupy a region the majority of whose population may not have supported the separatist cause [158]. Borotba,

meanwhile, provided a critical commentary that was longer than the statement itself, effectively contradicting its anti-war and anti-chauvinist position. As expected, they said that fascist features of the 'Kiev junta regime' did not allow the left to stay neutral; and that the Minsk statement demands surrender of Donbass militia. More revealingly, they felt that the statement was too 'unfair' to Russia:

In fact, there is almost no support from Russia, except for private initiatives. Recent actions of the Russian authorities say more about a willingness to surrender the rebels of Donbass, as soon as they throw up some offers such as "partial payment for gas.' Here, Kagarlitskiy, is probably closer to the truth, when he said that if Russia was truly a democratic regime, the Russian tanks would already be near Kiev. The Russian regime should be criticized not for intervention but for non-interference, bordering on the actual betrayal, which is accompanied by deafening patriotic and anti-fascist propaganda. [159].

The anarchists from AWU severely criticized the Minsk statement as being implicitly pro-Putin [160]); nevertheless, it prompted them to prepare their own statement [161] which also attracted quite a large number of signatures, mostly from anarchist and left-liberal camps. The AWU statement itself was an example of abstract criticism and a lack of any real political thinking. They were against the 'warring right-wing juntas' of DPR and LPR, and against the Ukrainian government; they were 'equally alien both to the concept of a united Ukraine and to ideas of "federalisation" or creation of a new state'; they were against fascists on both sides of the front line, though they specifically emphasised only fascists on the pro-Russian side; they were against lies and propaganda from all sides but also 'against war incitement under the guise of pacifism'. As is usually the case with anarchists, the positive part of the statement coming after the 'against everything bad' position was very weak. They proposed support for humanitarian initiatives to help internally-displaced people from the war-torn regions; support for workers' initiatives to fight for their labour rights (specifically emphasising the fact that labour activists are more in danger now in DPR/LPR territories than in the territories of Ukraine that are under Kiev government control, completely ignoring the issue of repression of left-wing activists in Ukraine); and ending with the clichéd formula: 'Only a strong labour movement that realises its interests will be able to establish peace in Ukraine' effectively postponing the anti-war agenda until some very distant point in the future, considering the weakness of the Ukrainian labour movement.

The biggest problem with all these statements was that, for the most part, their proposals are still no more than words on websites that have yet to be converted into practical politics. Neither a massive and powerful anti-war movement, nor the network of support for repressed left-wing activists in Ukraine promised by the Minsk statement, have emerged so far. Likewise the left did not initiate either the serious humanitarian initiatives or the systematic support for labour activists promised by the anarchist statement.

According to CSLR data for August-December 2014 only 243 protest events with *any* kind of criticism of the Ukrainian war policy or Ukrainian army were reported. This amounted to just over 7% of all protest events for the period, while the number of patriotic events campaigning for Ukrainian unity and against Russian intervention was 3-4 times higher. In plurality of the events (114) protesters criticized the army's various social problems of—poor supplies, lack of equipment, inequality in drafting ('why do oligarchs not send their kids to the ATO?'). 92 protests were directed against the draft and these were usually the protests of the relatives of the mobilized soldiers. The majority of the protest events concerning the war that have occurred in Ukraine so far were not protests against the unjust war as such. This is also the case for the even rarer 'anti-war' protests on DPR/LPR territories, which demanded the removal of the separatists' heavy weaponry from residential areas. These protests were motivated by a 'not in my backyard' logic as the Ukrainian army was returning fire, in the process causing unintended damage to buildings and infrastructure. Only 72 protests (out of 3,411 in total for the period) carried an explicitly anti-war message. And even these anti-war protests were not a coordinated campaign but rather local mobilisation of dispersed initiatives. Only 21 of these protests had more than one hundred participants according to media reports.

However, even in these rare anti-war protests the presence of the left was marginal. Participation of the left was reported in only seven events reported, almost always by the CPU and never by the new left. On the one hand, it would be naïve to expect a powerful anti-war movement to rise up at the same time that strong patriotic mobilisation is taking place in Ukraine. The anti-war actions organised by the left themselves would be inevitably very marginal and very probably repressed. For example, on September 27 in Kharkov the police stopped and arrested organisers of the CPU 'Peace march' [162]. At the same time, it was also clear that more could be done beyond statements and online anti-war agitation. It seems that no left-wing initiative has endeavoured to work systematically with the anti-draft protests in order to build links with aggrieved relatives, who have the potential to form a prospective group that could criticise the government and its policies. The CPU and Borotba were under repression but the new left was simply putting its head into the sand of social problems.

Humanitarian initiatives from the left were also very marginal compared to many initiatives organized by volunteers or by liberal, Western-funded NGOs. The most important and systematically operative initiative of this kind organised by the left was an anarchist squat called 'Avtonomiya' in Kharkov, founded in June 2014 and still in operation despite attacks from the far right and the police and considerable pressure from the authorities [163, 164]. For the Ukrainian anarchist movement it was an achievement to organise and sustain a true squat with free markets, a video club, discussions etc., making it a fully-developed social centre. However, the living space in the squat can house only around 15 people simultaneously [164] making it a drop in the ocean of over a million internally-displaced people in Ukraine.

The CPU, along with the parliamentary representatives they had before losing the elections in autumn 2014, obviously had more opportunities. They voted against the decision to start mobilising the army in July 2014, though the decision was, nevertheless, approved by the pro-government majority in the parliament [165]. The CPU leader Petro Symonenko was trying to promote his peace plan internationally, travelling to the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and visiting Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, who became an important mediator in peace talks between Ukraine and Russia [166, 167]. However, there is no evidence of any practical consequences as a result of this activity, despite repeated claims from Symonenko that everyone is quoting his peace plan, including the Ukrainian government. In March 2015, when discussions concerning the decentralisation of Ukraine's political system came to the parliament, the CPU suggested their own quite reasonable plan for decentralisation as 'the last chance to keep Ukraine united'. In contrast to the Ukrainian president's plan to decentralise power, which implied increasing the president's control over local authorities via the new institution of centrally-assigned prefects with wide powers, the CPU proposed comprehensive political, economic and cultural decentralisation [168]. Nevertheless, the CPU typically failed or even did not attempt to mobilise serious support behind their calls for a truly national discussion on the political system in Ukraine [169] and as usual it remained an empty gesture.

LEFT CHOOSING SIDES

It is tempting to call the following positions 'pro-war'. However, it would be more correct to describe them as the left clearly choosing a side in this war: either pro-Ukrainian, or pro-separatist/pro-Russian. Often the 'side-choosing' left presented the war as defensive from their 'own' side's point of view, so at least on the surface they were interested not in the escalation of the conflict but in defending the 'better' side from a greater evil. Nevertheless, some opinions were voiced that explicitly called for a more offensive position to be taken. For example, for the 'pro-Ukrainian' left, victory in the war could be seen as a way to continue the 'revolution' in Ukraine and to spread it as far as Russia with the aim of destroying the 'evil empire'. For the 'pro-separatist' left, the offensive position might mean establishing a so-called 'Greater Novorossiia' capturing all south-eastern Ukrainian regions beyond Donbass or even reconstituting the whole of Ukraine, thus providing more chances for socialist policies compared to their bleak perspectives in the small territories under separatist control in parts of Donetsk and Lugansk provinces. In some cases one's 'own' side in the conflict was presented not so much as better than the other but rather as much less bad compared to the greater evil. That is why instead of 'pro-Ukrainian' or 'pro-separatist' positions it would sometimes be more accurate to call them 'anti-Russian' or 'anti-Ukrainian' respectively.

There were a couple of turning points which helped these positions to crystallise. For the 'pro-separatist' left, the Odessa tragedy on 2 May and especially the cruel reaction of the pro-Ukrainian public played a critical role in mobilising people against the

'fascist' threat to the Donbass population. On the other hand, one of the crucial moments for the 'pro-Ukrainian' left was the direct involvement of Russian regular units at the end of August in preventing the separatist defeat and pushing them not to consider the conflict as a civil war any more, but rather to agree with patriotic members of the public that it was now a war between Ukraine's post-revolutionary government and Putin's Russia. However, these events only made the positions more entrenched and there was increased support for them in all the various left-wing groups in Ukraine.

The 'pro-Ukrainian' left-wing positions existed in at least three different forms and came from different sources: social-democratic, nationalist and radical liberal.

The marginal Justice party (the former United Left and Peasants) was the best example of those left-wing groups who aspired to build a 'true European social democracy' in Ukraine trying to distance themselves as much as possible from the pro-Russian and Soviet nostalgic position of the CPU in order to become more acceptable to the national-liberal public. In the context of general patriotic fervour this path led them occasionally to sound even more Catholic than the Pope. For example, at the party congress in August 2014 the leader Stanislav Nikolayenko said that the Justice party stood strongly in favour of a unified Ukraine; the state needed to mobilise all possible resources to overcome the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, fighting Russian aggression for Ukrainian sovereignty; it must proceed quickly with reforms relying on 'international financial-economic help' and the 'political solidarity of the West'. A member of the party's political executive committee, Oleksandr Baranivsky, said that there were no other left-of-centre parties in Ukraine with a firm patriotic position. He supported pro-European aspirations and condemned Russian military aggression [170]. The party even helped to collect money for the Ukrainian military in the Anti-Terrorist Operation [171] – a quite common volunteer practice in 2014 for the national-liberal public when the deficiency of state support for the army and lack of necessary equipment became apparent. In the October 2014 elections programme, the Justice party called the conflict 'a fratricidal war', however, a significant portion of the population in south-eastern regions were 'zombified' by Russian propaganda. In order to win this 'fratricidal war' the party promised measures to strengthen the Ukrainian military together with 'information sovereignty and information security' (effectively meaning political censorship in mass media) [172]. Effectively the Justice party supported all the Ukrainian government's key positions except for the neoliberal policies but this did not help them to become an accepted 'pro-Ukrainian' left.

The logic of the Autonomous Resistance was clearly nationalist. It was a 'Ukrainian-Russian war', a continuation and consequence of historical oppression of the Ukrainian nation by the Russian nation. In their statement published in March 2015 [173], they described the war as a just, defensive war on the part of the oppressed Ukrainian nation against the oppressor. They drew parallels between the local

Donbass population supporting separatists and Russian ‘colonisation’ of Donbass territories, repeating the nationalist myth about allegedly massive migration by Russian peasants after the Great Famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine (*Holodomor*)³² to the in Eastern Ukraine formerly populated by Ukrainians [174]. In reality the level of migration of Russian peasants to Donbass in 1933 and 1934 did not exceed even 20,000 people [175]. For AR there was no significant civil war element to the conflict. ‘This is as bad a joke as when one talks about the national “rights and freedoms” of the British in Ireland, whites in South Africa, Jews in Palestine, Spanish in the Basque Country and Catalonia, Turks in Kurdistan etc.’ [176]. In other texts they compared the separatist ‘people’s republics’ in Donbass with Rhodesia – the unrecognised state created by white colonisers to prevent Zimbabwe’s liberation [177]. Russians were the dominant nation in the Soviet Union and remained the ruling elite in south-eastern regions after Ukraine achieved independence [178]. From this perspective a ‘neutral’ anti-war position against both Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms was only a demagogy to legitimise passive support of the strongest oppressor nation [179]. In one of the articles published by the AR main website this position was stated as clearly as possible: the problem with the ‘people’s republics’ was not their reactionary policies emphasised by the liberal and libertarian pro-Maidan left but the fact that they were Russian:

Russians are an imperial, oppressor, coloniser nation. Ukrainians are colonised by them, they are an oppressed nation. ‘Novorossiya’ by its own existence wages war to continue dominance of Russians over Ukrainians, to continue oppression of Ukrainians. Therefore, any Russian republics in Ukraine do not have a right to exist regardless of their social-political ‘progressiveness’, and Ukrainians have a right to fight against these Russian republics. [180]

At the same time and in contrast to the Justice party, the AR position was clearly distinct and very critical of the government’s policies. They recognised the possibility that instead of Russian imperialism Ukraine might be subjugated to Western imperialism; however, they perceived Russian imperialism as more dangerous at that moment, and also dangerous to the very existence of the Ukrainian nation. The problem for Ukraine was precisely the absence of truly social-political revolution in Ukraine after Maidan. The Ukrainian bourgeoisie was not able to defend Ukrainian interests and will always compromise them in order to agree with the Russian ‘colonising bourgeoisie’. Social revolution needs to stop neoliberal reforms and restrictions on civic rights, and solve the problem with army supplies [173]. AR criticised the first Minsk agreement as a compromise with the ‘colonisers’ and suggested that the best solution would be to form a people’s guerrilla army to fight imperialists [181]. Later they specified that maintaining the front line against the ‘occupants’ was important; therefore, social-revolutionary activism in Ukraine and

³² *Holodomor* is often interpreted in Ukrainian nationalist historiography as an ethnic genocide of Ukrainians by the Communists.

fighting at the front were both necessary [173]. Indeed some AR activists have actually joined Ukrainian volunteer battalions.

A less exotic source of left-wing support for Ukraine in the war came from degradation of the postmodern liberal and libertarian left into radical liberalism servile to Western imperialism. This position was best exemplified by an anarchist web-site called 'Nihilist' close to the Autonomous Workers Union. Unlike the left-wing nationalists, Nihilist's implicit support for Ukraine was not based on the question of historical oppression of Ukrainians but specifically on the relative progressiveness of Ukraine in this conflict. AWU activists Volodymyr Zadyraka and Alexander Volodarsky stated this position more explicitly. Maidan was a bourgeois revolution challenging corrupt bureaucracy. It did not accomplish its tasks because of the counter-revolutionary intervention from Russia. In Donbass the 'counter-revolution' took the form of a 'clerical-conservative' reaction. The ideology of the DPR/LPR is allegedly a Russian form of 'totalitarian nationalism', 'fascism under an antifascist cover', while Putin's regime in Russia is only a 'less terrorist form of the same fascist political ideal'. Nihilist's analysis here was reminiscent of hysterical texts by the PSPU from the opposing side. On the other hand, Ukrainian fascists were weaker and took only secondary positions in the Ukrainian government. They were allegedly participating in the process of new civic nation-building and so not as dangerous as Russian 'imperial' nationalism. What implications did it have for supporting the war? Zadyraka said that in the conflict between capitalism and fascism it would be strange for an anarchist to support capitalism. Instead, he would not denounce either deserters from the army, or those who joined the Ukrainian army and explicitly recalled the difficult choice for anarchists during WWII – joining or not the armies of the bourgeois nations in the fight against the Nazis [182].

Nevertheless, Nihilist chose their side, and it was very clear which side this was. While systematically posting hypercritical articles denouncing Borotba and other 'leftist friends of Novorossiia' full of manipulations and ad hominem arguments, they also published a sympathetic interview with an anonymous 'Marxist' who voluntarily joined the Ukrainian military [183]. At the same time they criticised the anti-war movement as 'incompetent', 'hypocritical' and 'simply stupid', that unites the left and the right [184]. While it is true that the Ukrainian far right did not obtain power after Maidan, Nihilist consistently downplayed the censorship and political repression of the new Ukrainian government, in no way comparing it with 'fascist' Russia. Russia itself was not glued together by anything except for the repressive authoritarian state, Alexander Volodarsky said, and was destined to collapse and fall apart when Putin's regime fell, which should be celebrated by the left [185]. This was written in the context of Ukraine suppressing the armed uprising, while calls for federalisation were treated with great suspicion as a pro-Russian agenda. Obviously Nihilist's authors usually rejected the very existence of a civil war component in the conflict despite the fact that in February and spring 2014 they warned of the coming civil war at least twice [81, 58]. Now all the blame for the start of the war and its continuation was laid

on Yanukovych and Russia [186]. Instead, they were uncritically reproducing the liberal intellectuals' myth about the birth of the new political nation in Ukraine when ethnic origins or language allegedly became unimportant as long as one supported the results of Maidan [187]. At the same time they never mentioned the fact that many rebels in Donbass were motivated by similar myths about another 'political nation' – the Soviet people – and even the 'Russian world' idea was also sometimes interpreted in a political rather than an ethnic way [188]. Would it be rather a clash of nationalisms than a counter-revolution against a revolution?

Nihilist's authors sounded much more servile to the government and dominant national-liberal ideology than even nationalists from the Autonomous Resistance who despite support for Ukraine in this war, did not perceive it as any kind of revolution, and were explicitly critical of the government's neoliberal social policies and attacks on political freedoms. Instead, for Nihilist the conflict between one of the richest oligarchs in Ukraine, Ihor Kolomoyskyi and the somewhat poorer oligarch Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian president, was still a struggle between counter-revolutionary and revolutionary tendencies [79]. At one point, they were even hoping to ride the wave of liberal criticism of corruption and bureaucracy, and were essentially proposing to radicalise neoliberal reforms, arguing for radical cuts to the state apparatus without challenging capitalism first [189]. Like the Justice party, Nihilist and AWU could sometimes sound even more Catholic than the Pope.

The sources of this position are various. This is a version of vulgar Marxism that comes from ignorance of major advances in Marxist theory in the XXth century, allowing for an uncritical application of linear templates about bourgeois revolutions, not inquiring whether the interests of the bourgeoisie are still progressive in the XXIst century and whether it is still the vanguard of social progress. They also do not reflect upon the very uneven distribution of the global capitalist class concentrated in the core countries of the global capitalist system. In this situation even if the 'revolution' serves the bourgeoisie it means that it serves primarily the interests of global capital but not the interests of the majority of the Ukrainian population. Another source is sectarian left-wing anti-communism, which is very hostile to the defence of Soviet achievements, treating them as a concession to Stalinism and completely denying any positive and progressive meaning in Soviet symbolism and nostalgia in the separatist movement. A final source was the postmodernist attack on the class-centric politics of the left that prioritised symbolic emancipation of the minorities while reconciling with the fundamental political-economic institutions of global capitalism. If the agenda of bourgeois revolutions is still progressive, capitalism is not the main enemy of the left and the liberals are very natural strategic allies against conservative reactionaries. The masses rebelling against the liberal agenda – not only because of its cultural but also economic consequences – were often met with an explicitly elitist attitude: 'The people [in Donbass] are not enemies but they do bear moral responsibility for the desire to bring back the good old [Soviet] days. The rabble is the pillar for conservatism', AWU activist Volodymyr Zadyraka said. The problem of

Western imperialism subjugation of Ukraine was mocked as nothing more than a dangerous conspiracy theory serving Russian propaganda interests and bringing together pro-Russian far right and the 'authoritarian' left on the platform of 'anti-imperialism' – the word became literally a curse among many left-libertarian activists. In the agenda-setting article with its telling title 'Cosmopolitanism against the Russian World' [190] Alexander Volodarsky celebrated the new world of progressive globalisation opposed by the fundamentally conservative Russian nationalist project. The new stateless world of global corporations and transnational institutions like the EU was not perceived to be without its problems, but it was only by building one, according to Volodarsky, that a truly worldwide revolution could happen and that Ukraine could have an opportunity to join this brave new global world. Needless to say, the author completely ignored the questions of uneven development of the capitalist world-system, the extremely uneven strength of different states, uneven distribution of the leading corporations and of the capitalist class across the globe. The argument recalls the theory of 'ultraimperialism' by Karl Kautsky or 'Empire' by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, popular a decade ago, that allegedly replaced competing imperialist blocs. One of the minor but sad consequences of Maidan was that it resurrected theories among the left that had been criticised and dismissed many years previously.

Despite signing the Minsk anti-war statement together with the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian left (though with considerable criticism) and plenty of anti-war rhetoric and some public actions [191, 192, 193, 194], in a number of organisational statements and articles, the political sympathies of Borotba were equally clear. Among the significant organised left-wing groups in Ukraine only Borotba expressed open if critical support for the DPR/LPR. Borotba supported the DPR and LPR from the very beginning [131], though immediately on the same day they published another statement '[a]gainst the conservative turn in the Donetsk People's Republic' [195] criticising the introduction of the state religion (Eastern Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, removed from the final version of the text) and equality of all forms of property in the constitutional project of the DPR. Borotba has been continuing the same political line up to the present day: criticising minor (or presented as 'minor') deficiencies of the DPR and LPR but generally calling for resistance against Ukrainian 'fascist' and oligarch regimes supported by imperialism (understood almost exclusively as US imperialism). The aim of this 'resistance' as Borotba presented it was, nevertheless, not separatist states covering small territories but the transformation of the whole of Ukraine based on more democratic and social principles [196, 197]. They emphasised the 'class' dimension of the conflict: Maidan was allegedly a bloc of the largest oligarchs, petty bourgeois and declassed elements while the 'resistance movement in the South-East' was presented as 'more proletarian in its class composition' [198]. The Ukrainian conflict, moreover, is a part of the global class struggle against (American) imperialism. Borotba called for a

‘united front against fascism and imperialism -- from Lugansk and Donetsk to Istanbul and Kobáne!’ [199].

The deteriorating social-economic situation in Ukraine, neoliberal policies, political repression, the dependency of the new government on the United States and international financial institutions, the far right threat, atrocities caused by the Ukrainian army and volunteer battalions during the war in Donbas – all were targets of sharp and systematic criticism, while quite similar or sometimes even worse problems in the DPR/LPR were downplayed, silenced, justified or legitimated. A good example is an agenda-setting article by Viktor Shapinov, the ideological leader of Borotba, ‘Marxism and the war in Donbass’ [200] where he for the first time tries to argue systematically for support of the DPR/LPR and against the ‘Marxist pacifism’ that blames both camps equally. The typical left-wing attacks against the new Ukrainian government were compared with the allegedly superior and more progressive politics of DPR/LPR. However, Shapinov’s arguments were extremely weak and demagogical. He appeals to the ‘antifascism’ and ‘internationalism’ of Donbass rebels when it is obvious that ‘antifascist’ rhetoric was directed against Ukrainian nationalism (sometimes even of moderate kind) but not against Russian far right nationalism. ‘Anti-oligarchic’ rhetoric is an empty signifier in Ukraine exploited by almost any Ukrainian party and politician including by the oligarch Petro Poroshenko himself who argued for the ‘deoligarchisation’ of Ukrainian politics [201]. Finally, ‘anti-neoliberal policies’ meant only ‘tentative steps’ to nationalise some retail chains and mines in Donbass owned by pro-Ukrainian oligarchs or simply left by their owners. However, it is not surprising for small emerging states in a military conflict to introduce some form of redistributive system to sustain the suffering population and to take some assets under state control. It does not yet mean that a strategic anti-neoliberal policy has been put in place. Nor does it mean that nationalisation and redistributive policies will be sustained when the immediate military threat is gone or the economy is stabilised. Most importantly, one can ask whether the Russian government upon which the DPR and LPR are fully dependent, both in the military and economic spheres, will allow and economically support any truly progressive regime on its borders, when Russian social-economic policies are themselves neoliberal. In the summer of 2014 Shapinov predicted that ‘the very logic of the struggle pushes the leaders of the DPR and LPR toward anti-oligarchic, if not anti-capitalist, politics’ [202]. During the following year of struggles, this prediction was not fulfilled. At the end of the article Shapinov recognises that,

Of course, this policy is not socialist. But it leaves room for the left, the communists, to participate in such a movement under their own banner, with their own ideas and slogans, without abandoning their own views and program. [200]

He was right that the openly pro-separatist left would indeed have problems regarding political activity on the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government.

However, this does not yet mean that no other left-wing movement can have activities ‘under their own banner, with their own ideas and slogans, without abandoning their own view and program’. This assessment strongly recalls the pro-Maidan new left projecting their own problems onto the whole population when supporting Ukraine, and being afraid of Russia or separatists taking control of the territories. It might indeed have meant repression against the left but the majority of the population would care more about security, jobs, wages and prices and not about formal control of the state. The ‘progressiveness’ of the fighting side was partially dependent on the simple question of where this or that particular left-wing group would be more comfortable in continuing with their own political activities.

Another thing that surprisingly unites the pro-separatist and pro-Ukrainian left is in essence a very similar idea about the current global order. For Shapinov this is the hierarchical imperialist system led by the US. It is not a competition of rival imperialisms such as that which existed before WWI, but rather the system as a whole falling to pieces because some capitalist groups (states or transnational formations) are trying to revise it while others are trying to preserve the status quo. In this situation progressive movements apparently benefit from the assistance of anti-American rivals, in the same way that Irish republicans during WWI agreed to help from the Germans – a fact that does not deny left-wing support of the Easter Rising in 1916. The same applies to external support of Spanish republicans during the civil war and of Rojava Kurds now. So, why is Donbass different?

Without going into excessive detail over why the DPR and LPR are indeed fundamentally different from these iconic left-wing examples (at the level of dependency on external powers at least), what is important here is to underline the fact that the current situation concerning American hegemony is not something unique. As a well-respected world-system analysis in the social sciences shows, there were at least two examples of hegemony in the capitalist world-system: the British Empire in the XIX century and the Netherlands in the XVII century [203]. WWI and WWII began at a time when British hegemony was crumbling and was being challenged by other imperialist states. However, unlike a century ago when strong social-democratic and workers' movement could play an independent role in world events, nowadays a much weaker and more disorganised left would rather become a puppet in the hands of anti-American rivals than be able to exploit them in their own interest and retain independence as Irish republicans did. Now, would it strengthen or weaken the socialist movement if it became a minor ally, if not a mere puppet, of a stronger but fundamentally adversary force from the EU, US or Russia? Would it be more helpful at this time of imperialist rivalry to articulate class antagonism and build politics in opposition to both (and other) competing camps?

UKRAINIAN LEFT-WING COMBATANTS IN THE WAR

The question of whether combatants actually took part in fighting on either the Ukrainian or separatist sides is quite different from the question of whether or not to

support this or that side of the war in statements on the Internet. In fact, none of above-mentioned left-wing groups in Ukraine joined fighting units as a *collective*. This in itself is a telling fact, showing that the 'pro-war' left was hardly less impotent than the anti-war left. It seems that whether or not to join armed units was mostly an individual decision, supported by informal networks of friendship rather than by activist organisations.

Pro-Ukrainian left-wing combatants were extremely rare. Estimates of 'fewer than 50 men' made by Maksym Osadchuk, the most well-known combatant among them from Aidar battalion, are probably an exaggeration or based on too broad a definition of the left [204]. The left did not form any distinct union within pro-Ukrainian forces, unlike the far right which formed a number of volunteer battalions and other armed groups directly affiliated with far-right political organisations (such as the Social-National Assembly's Azov regiment, Svoboda's Sich battalion, the Right Sector's Ukrainian Volunteer Corps and others). On the contrary, the left were dispersed among different units – volunteer battalions, the army, the National Guard – including even those that were dominated by the far right and had an open neo-Nazi identity such as the infamous Azov [205]. Paradoxically, it seems that most of these left-wing combatants came from subcultural antifascist/football ultras networks. Kiev's Arsenal football team supporters were particularly important. They had long been known for their antifascist position (very unpopular among Ukrainian ultras). However, they supported Maidan and occasionally cooperated with the far right in street actions (see the chapter on Ukrainian left in Maidan protests). Joining ATO forces was something of a logical step for activists with a stronger commitment to street fights than to any coherent ideology. In comments and interviews they mention different justifications for direct cooperation with the far right, for example, 'we forgot our conflicts in the face of aggressor and occupant' [206], 'the far right do not have their own agenda in this war' [205], 'the ultraright, like the left, are in the minority. The majority are generally democratic or moderately patriotic people' [204].

Almost all pro-Ukrainian left-wing combatants saw the war in Donbass as only the start; they hoped to continue the 'revolution' later on in Kiev and probably help to export it to Russia. However, without any organised power beyond a very loose network of support pretentiously called the Black Guard of Ukraine (following the name of a historical Makhnovite armed group), they will not make any substantial impact on the direction of this 'revolution' (which will probably be even more right-wing than Maidan) just as they failed to have an impact during Maidan or the ATO. Meanwhile, some of the left-wing combatants were showing obvious signs of moving to the right themselves. In an interview one of the Arsenal ultras fighting with Ukrainian forces still called himself an antifascist and antiracist but no longer identified as left-wing, adding that in 'fascist Italy there were some sympathetic things... Strong vertical power, elimination of pro-Soviet opposition, positive changes in the economy' [207].

The left is represented in far greater numbers on the separatist side. Combatants issue from various sources such as local CPU cells in the Donetsk and Lugansk provinces and, particularly, its youth organisation *Komsomol*; volunteers from Russian left-wing organisations; and a number of leftist activists from Western Europe and other foreign countries. Moreover, some non-partisan combatants, who for the most part had not participated in politics before joining Anti-Maidan protests or separatist militia, identify themselves with communism or socialism. Aside from purely numerical superiority over pro-Ukrainian left-wing combatants, it was even more important for the pro-separatist left to form an armed organised unit with a clear left-wing identity – the Volunteer Communist Detachment (VCD) within the Prizrak (meaning ‘ghost’) brigade.

The Prizrak brigade, famous among the ‘anti-imperialist’ left, was created by the rebel commander Aleksey Mozgovoy and was mostly based in the town of Alchevsk in the Lugansk province. It would be wrong to call Mozgovoy himself an ideological leftist. Despite obtaining an iconic status within some parts of the left and even being compared to Che Guevara following his murder on 23 May 2015, Mozgovoy would hardly have agreed that he was left-wing. He often called himself a monarchist and reproached Bolsheviks for destroying the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, he indeed possessed certain progressive ideas regarding popular democracy with a strong egalitarian component – the so-called ‘people’s state’. He strongly criticised separatist authorities for reproducing old Ukrainian or Russian structures, betraying the aspirations of the Donbass people for radical change. He often emphasised the fact that it was the Ukrainian government that was the enemy and not its people, and participated in several attempts to start a dialogue with Tetyana Montyan, a well-known Ukrainian opposition lawyer, and even with Ukrainian military officers, calling on them to fight together against the oligarchs in Kiev. At the same time his nationalist, conservative and sexist ideas were also evident, particularly in a well-publicised case of the ‘people’s court’ deciding on the fate of two rapists by a majority vote of a random crowd in a room [208]. To sum up, Mozgovoy was a populist and, like any populist, could easily go both to the left and to the right depending on the general direction of political developments, changes in the social base of his movement and other external factors. His Communist supporter and deputy commander Aleksey Markov was very clear about the difference between VCD ideology and Mozgovoy’s:

Is it possible to talk about any ideological affinity between the [Volunteer] Communist Detachment and the brigade’s commander Aleksey Mozgovoy?

No. The brigade’s commander Mozgovoy openly calls himself a monarchist. Though he said many times that he would be ready to be a communist or whatever if only it would help to liberate Novorossiia and build a state here for the people. [209]

In April 2015 the Prizrak brigade became part of the People's Militia of the LPR under the central operational command [210]. Before his murder Mozgovoy was intensifying his criticism of LPR authorities, probably as a response to repression, killing and stricter control over independent rebel commanders in the process of building centralised armed forces in the DPR/LPR. At the beginning of May 2015 Mozgovoy went into direct conflict with them, giving permission for the international Antifascist festival of leftist Novorossiia supporters to be organised in Alchevsk. These supporters were coming from abroad and the festival had previously been banned by authorities in Lugansk [211].

The Prizrak brigade itself was definitely the most progressive unit among the separatist armed units but also reflected the above-mentioned populist mixture uniting communists, monarchists, Russian nationalist Cossaks and Russian pagans. In March 2015 even a group of Russian neo-Nazis called 'Rusich' was allowed to join Prizrak for a short time. The new commander of the brigade, Yuriy Shevchenko, who took command after Mozgovoy's murder, continues this line. In an interview he said that Prizrak's ideology was 'uniting' (*obiedinaiushchaia*). It united different people with different political views to fight injustice. He was clearly speaking against ethnic interpretations of the 'Russian world' and pointing out that fighting for a 'pure Russian world' might lead to fascism. He respects communists, but also Stalin and Putin, as state-builders (*gosudarstvenniki*). Shevchenko would support a sensible idea coming from any political position – communist or monarchist – and was against ideological dogmatism [212]. A video with new recruits to Prizrak published in July 2015 is a very good illustration of this mixture: among three new recruits one clearly identified with the 'left-wing ideas in the social sphere' of Mozgovoy and aspired to a socialist state, another was aspiring to the greatness of the Russian Empire, while a third was simply attracted by that fact that people in Prizrak fought 'for an idea' (*za ideiu*) and not for money [213]. Therefore, Prizrak was indeed the unit that was most tolerant towards the left among separatist forces and it attracted many leftists from Ukraine, Russia and other foreign countries. However, at the same time it was equally open to Russian nationalists even of a far-right persuasion, who consciously united people with quite different ideologies on a social populist platform.

Still, there is evidence that the left was increasing its influence within Prizrak. The Volunteer Communist Detachment (VCD) was formed in autumn 2014 by two Russian Communists: Aleksey Markov, a former member of the Communist Party of Russian Federation (CPRF), and Pyotr Biryukov, not a member of any party but identifying as a communist. The VCD played an important role in taking Debaltsevo town in February; they believe it was one of the factors that allowed Mozgovoy to retain the brigade as a separate unit during the centralisation of the armed forces in the DPR/LPR [214]. Since then, the VCD as a subunit and its commanders have become increasingly visible. Biryukov and Markov were appointed as deputy commanders of the brigade and after the death of Mozgovoy gave press-conferences and recorded video appeals as among the most senior members of the brigade, together with the

new commander Yuriy Shevchenko [215, 216]. In winter 2015 during the Debaltsevo campaign membership of the VCD was around 120 people and later it has decreased during the truce to 60 people. Aside from military tasks VCD has also organised political education in the brigade on history and political economy. The unit claimed to be among the most disciplined in the brigade, and has taken on the re-education of soldiers from other brigades following minor misconducts [209]. In the recent interviews Aleksey Markov described the VCD not as a distinct detachment any more but as a 'knightly order' of the most committed people within the whole Prizrak uniting most of the brigade's higher command and many subunits commanders [217, 218].

In parallel, Prizrak established the military-political department in the brigade following the institution of commissars or *politruks* in the Soviet army. Former members of the CPU and Borotba joined the political department and it appears that the left is clearly dominating there. It seems that the Communists have a determining influence on the propaganda materials of the Prizrak. The ideological principles of the Prizrak brigade, formulated in the summer of 2015 after Mozgovoy's murder, were full of progressive messages about democracy, against oligarchs, and in favour of labour, a just society, friendship between people and freedom of conscience. They were obviously strongly influenced by the Communist wing of the brigade.

Opinions, religious beliefs and political beliefs are the private affair of each member of the team. However, they must unite around the fundamental principles of the people's ideology -- anti-fascism, anti-oligarchism and democracy. Any hateful ideology (right-wing radicalism, neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, racism) is alien and hostile to any brigade fighter. [188]

At the same time they emphasised the fact that Prizrak associates itself with the so-called 'Russian world' which, however, was defined not ethnically but politically:

[The Russian world] brings together different cultures, nationalities and linguistic characteristics, but has a common mentality hostile to fascism, Nazism and racism, and has its own domestic and psychological characteristics that have always helped us to defend our homeland and beat the enemy in the most difficult times. The Russian world is a worldview and attitude, the spirit of its carriers. Novorossiia is the front line of the Russian world. [188]

However, the extent of communism in the VCD should not be exaggerated. One could see Soviet symbolic in almost every video from the VCD but there is barely any mention of Marxism. 'Antifascism' was the primary motivation to fight for the separatists – an over-exaggerated perception of a 'genocidal' threat coming from the post-Maidan government and Ukrainian far right to Russians, Russian-speakers or those who did not accept Maidan [209, 219, 220]. For many people the turning point was the 2 May tragedy in Odessa and especially the cynical and gloating reaction of the pro-Ukrainian public [221]. Despite the name of the detachment, ideological commitment to left-wing ideas was not necessary. As Aleksey Markov said, among

the first members of the VCD there were people from monarchist organisations and later these were joined by nationalists and Russian pagans [209]. The change of rhetoric in the VCD's recruitment material is telling. In the first online announcement they were calling for recruits with 'left-wing, socialist views' to 'liberate Novorossiia from Ukro-fascist aggression' [222]. A couple of weeks later they corrected this too-obvious (though popular among separatists) anti-Ukrainian rhetoric equating Ukrainian nationalism with fascism and called instead for the liberation of Novorossiia *and* the Ukrainian people from 'Banderovite fascism' [223]. Later still they were no longer appealing to 'left-wing, socialist views' but using much more general patriotic phrases calling for people to fight against oligarchs, for a just society, for the country's pride and to defend their people [224]. The VCD might be made more attractive by their greater discipline and general ideological commitment than by anything specifically communist compared to the more centralised but also more corrupt emerging armies of the DPR and LPR, inviting many mercenaries [209]. The ideological rhetoric of the VCD is communism based on the Soviet 'Great Patriotic War against the Nazis' narrative, devoid of Marxism and class struggle. As far as they are concerned, the conflict in Ukraine is a national-liberation struggle for the new state of Novorossiia where class struggle and socialism were postponed until some distant future. The head of Prizrak's political department, a former Borotba activist called Yevgeniy Vallenberg, could not say it more clearly during the international Antifascist forum: 'This is not a social revolution' but 'a national-liberation war of the Donbass peoples, greater Novorossiia peoples and those in Ukraine who disagree with principles of political intolerance' [225]. The first task was to build the new states and defend them against the threat from Ukraine; any political splits in Novorossiia should be avoided [226]. Markov agrees that at the moment there is no politics in 'people's republics' and this may change only when the external threat is liquidated [227]. This primarily patriotic and anti-class struggle position of the VCD and leading Prizrak communists brings them closer not to the pro-Ukrainian left nationalists Autonomous Resistance, but rather to those liberal (ex-)left-wing groups who are cooperating with the post-Maidan government, trying to optimise neoliberal reforms and resist the most obvious conservative initiatives, but also postponing the class agenda until some indefinite point in the future. Now Prizrak communists sound even less critical and more loyal to the DPR/LPR authorities than Mozgovoy was before his murder (for example, he gave a speech on May Day in Alchevsk emphasising that the war is going on not just against fascism but for labour rights, social rights and people's power at the grassroots level [228]). Indeed, one may speculate that Mozgovoy's murder might have been one of the reasons for this increase in outspoken loyalty. The new Prizrak command called on its followers not to speculate over whom to blame for the murder, and stuck to the main official version that it was carried out by Ukrainian diversionists [216], despite the fact that there were many reasons to assume after similar attacks and instances of repression on the part of other independent rebel commanders that someone from the separatist side might have

been involved in the murder, at least by providing information on Mozgovoy's route to Ukrainian forces [229].

Even if we consider these loyalist statements as just a trick to avoid repression and cover up a much deeper and truly socialist agenda, the chances that Prizrak will become the vanguard of the movement for social transformation and not just for the creation of small Russian-dependent states are very low. Prizrak membership is estimated at between 600 and three or four thousand according to different sources³³. The lower numbers, 600-700 people, were recently put forward by Markov [230]. Estimations about the total number of Novorossiia armed forces are usually around the 40-50 thousand mark. One of the main points Prizrak emphasises is its volunteer nature, contrary to most other separatist detachments where combatants receive a wage [209] (especially after the process of centralised military structure building in the DPR and LPR was ended). In July 2015 Markov revealed that they receive maintenance from the LPR for only 270 people, which is then distributed equally among all Prizrak soldiers in addition with humanitarian help from the CPRF and other Russian private initiatives [227]. However, volunteers may be an advantage but also a deficiency: during the truce in Donbass and after Russia intervened into Syrian war the supply of volunteers has shrunk [231].

Any isolated revolt or even overly-independent actions by Prizrak will be easily suppressed. Prizrak will strongly oppose and will probably continue the doomed armed struggle against attempts to re-integrate Donbass into Ukraine at it is presupposed by Minsk agreements without a radical change of regime in Ukraine for pro-Russian government. In the case of Ukrainian regime collapse, the defeat of Ukrainian armed forces and new possibilities for creating the 'Greater Novorossiia' or even 'liberating' Kiev and Lviv as separatist rebels had often hoped, any deepening of the 'revolution' will also depend on overcoming the Russian government's tight control over it. If Putin falls while the Ukrainian regime remains stable, many separatist combatants, especially Russian volunteers, will be torn between the necessity to maintain the front line in Ukraine and the desire to join the fight in Russia. In case of freezing the conflict and maintaining quasi-independent DPR/LPR Prizrak may try to establish a peaceful social-populist movement, though it will be a typical red and brown coalition of communists with Russian nationalists. It will also critically depend on the degree of the liberalization in DPR/LPR as Prizrak predictably will be seen as dangerous radicals. In the current stalemate situation and top-level negotiations between the Great Powers, Prizrak can only play the role of attracting left-wing activists to volunteer on the side of Russian imperialist interests. Any more radical aspirations have chances to become reality only if the Russian regime collapses.

³³ The wide range also reflects the high turnover of volunteers, occurrences during active military operations and dropping off of numbers in quieter times.

If only one word is used to describe Ukrainian left-wing activities in relation to the war, that word must be 'impotence' – the impotence of virtually every possible position in this situation: anti-war, pro-Ukrainian, pro-separatist, anti-Ukrainian, anti-Russian. Instances of repression in Ukraine and the non-democratic regime in DPR/LPR only partially explain the lack of any significant anti-war activities on the part of the left. The left-wing combatants who joined either the Ukrainian or the separatist side have virtually no political perspectives to radicalise their respective 'revolutions' in a socialist way, even if we close our eyes to their primarily nationalist rather than class-based agenda. Even if major political turmoils occur in either Ukraine or Russia, the weak left minority will be outcompeted in the leadership race by stronger nationalist forces. Online left-wing cheerleaders for this or that side play their own dubious role. An independent socialist position against competing imperialisms needs to be defended against both the 'red and brown' tendency of Soviet and pro-Soviet communists to turn it into a conservative wing of Russian imperialism and the parallel 'black and brown' tendency of the postmodern liberal and libertarian left to turn it into a liberal wing of US and EU imperialisms.

CURRENT PROSPECTS OF THE UKRAINIAN LEFT

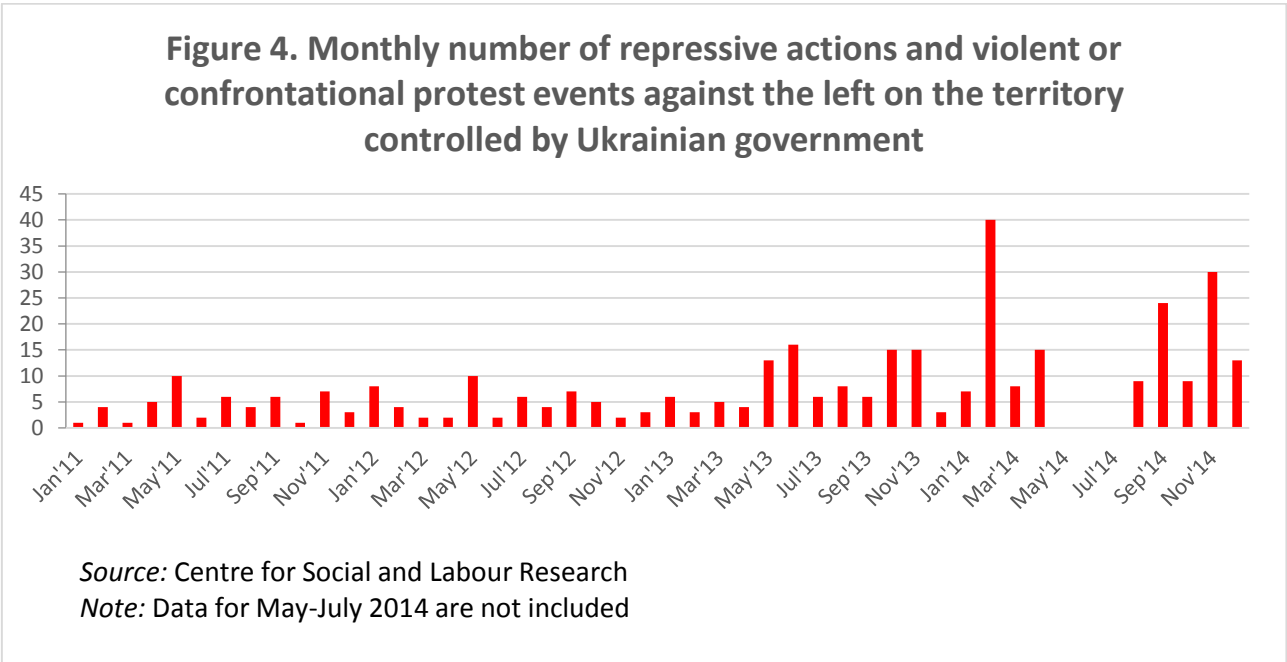
The Ukrainian left now is even more defeated, even weaker and more divided than they were before Maidan. The recent electoral results of the old left-wing parties were disastrous. At the presidential elections in May 2014 Petro Symonenko won 1.5% of the vote - the lowest result in his electoral history. As mentioned before, he withdrew his candidacy (though later than he was required to withdraw by electoral procedures) complaining about the escalation of violence in Donbass and Odessa and attacks against CPU MPs and activists in the parliament and on the streets [110]. He would not have had many chances even if he had not withdrawn, and the main reason for the lowest-ever result was the loss of parts of Donbass and Crimea where CPU had traditionally had strong support. Nevertheless, it was also clear that even in the context of severely negative attitudes towards the post-Maidan government in South-Eastern provinces, citizens there would rather abstain from voting than support the parties of the old regime [232].

Other left-wing parties did not even ballot their candidates. The United Left and Peasants supported Petro Poroshenko who won the elections [233]; the Socialist party supported Olha Bohomolets – one of the pro-Maidan politicians positioning herself as an 'independent', not an 'oligarchic' candidate – who got only 1.9% of the votes. The PSPU considered the elections a 'US special operation to legitimise their puppets' and did not recognise it [234], although they have also not had enough resources to participate in national elections since 2007.

Before the parliamentary elections in October 2014, the parliament increased the participation fees for the parties, essentially giving preference to stronger parties with

oligarchs' support. Justice, the former United Left and Peasants party, was able to participate only in single-member districts [235]. The SPU was disorganised with internal conflicts. The PSPU obviously did not recognise elections as it believed they legitimised 'coup-d'etats', civil war, repression etc [236]. The CPU participated and for the first time in their history did not get into the parliament with 3.9% of the votes, below the 5% threshold. The absolute number of votes was also the lowest ever – 612 000. No left-wing candidates managed to win elections in the single-member district either. For the first time in the history of Ukraine as an independent nation, no even nominally left-wing party is in parliament, not even a single left-wing MP.

Of course, increased instances of repression also have to do with the marginalisation of the Ukrainian left. In the year after the Maidan protests began, the left was attacked and repressed more frequently than during the three years before Maidan. Figure 4 shows the monthly figures for repressive actions on the part of the state against left-wing parties and organisations including (an almost equal number of) violent and confrontational actions on the part of non-state actors³⁴. Most frequently these were physical attacks against communist activists, agitators for the party, and attacks on CPU offices. The state authorities and law-enforcement most frequently employed arrests or detainment and bans on organising peaceful assemblies. At least 50 left-wing activists were arrested or detained after the start of Maidan and around 30 were injured according to media reports. At least two left-wing activists – Andriy Brazhevsky from Borotba and Vadim Papura from CPU youth organisation – died on 2 May in Odessa. Note that the CSLR data are based on Ukrainian media reports and do not cover the whole 2014 at the time of writing, so the scale of repressions in reality may be significantly higher. Petro Symonenko reported about 400 criminal cases opening against CPU members [237].



³⁴ This violence is directly specifically against left-wing organisations, so, for example, the large number of attacks against Lenin’s monuments and other Soviet symbols is not included here.

A notorious case of repression against the left continuing at the time of writing is the trial of Alexander Bondarchuk, the former CPU MP and the leader of the All-Ukrainian Union of Workers (once the most radical wing of the CPU). In 2014 he joined Vitrenko's hysterical Front of People's Resistance to Eurocolonisation. In March 2014 he was charged in publishing separatist calls in the small *Working Class* newspaper he edited, however, no independent expertise proved that the articles contained anything illegal. Another case continuing for more than a year is the trial of two communists Sergey Tkachenko and Denis Timofeyev from Dneprodzerzhinsk, Dnepropetrovsk province. They are charged in encroachment on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, storing explosives and separatist publications. The defence believes that the Security Service of Ukraine falsified the evidence during the search.

The target of these increased instances of repression and attacks against the left was predominantly the CPU. Their activists, agitators, and offices were the target of 122 crackdowns and attacks out of 169 in total. Repression and attacks were also directed against other old left-wing parties and Borotba.

However, the scale of the repressive actions, confrontation and violence has increased overall, not just against the left. For example, according to CSLR data the number of negative reactions against the protests was 18 per 100 protests in 2013 before Maidan started, 34 per 100 protests in August-December 2014, and 57 per 100 protests in April-June 2015 [8]. Most often the Ukrainian government targeted pro-separatist activity. Former members of Yanukovich's Party of Regions and especially former officials under Yanukovich rule have also been targets of crackdowns and attacks. The increased scale of repression against the CPU must be seen in this context, considering the CPU's effective support of Yanukovich during the Maidan protests and the later involvement of many CPU members and officials in separatist activities despite statements by the CPU leadership. Moreover, the pro-Maidan new left was subjected to far fewer instances of repression and attacks after the start of Maidan than the CPU. There were several attacks on new left activists by the far rights and crackdowns following social-economic protests, but these were occurring even before Maidan; the scale of repression has so far not increased.

Nevertheless, aside from the anti-separatists, there is a clear anti-communist component in crackdowns on the part of the post-Maidan government. Despite decisions made by local authorities in February 2014, the government did not ban the Party of Regions nationally; neither did it ban its successor party, the Opposition Bloc. Meanwhile, proposals to ban the CPU or communist ideology in general had been appearing since the first days of the Maidan victory. The CPU group were attacked in the parliament, then removed from the parliamentary session, then disbanded in July 2014. In the same month, the Ministry of Justice initiated a legal process to ban the CPU for supporting separatist activities. The trial was proceeding very slowly; in February 2015 all ten of the judges involved in the case refused to continue because of pressure from the prosecutor general's office [238]. Finally, in April 2015 the

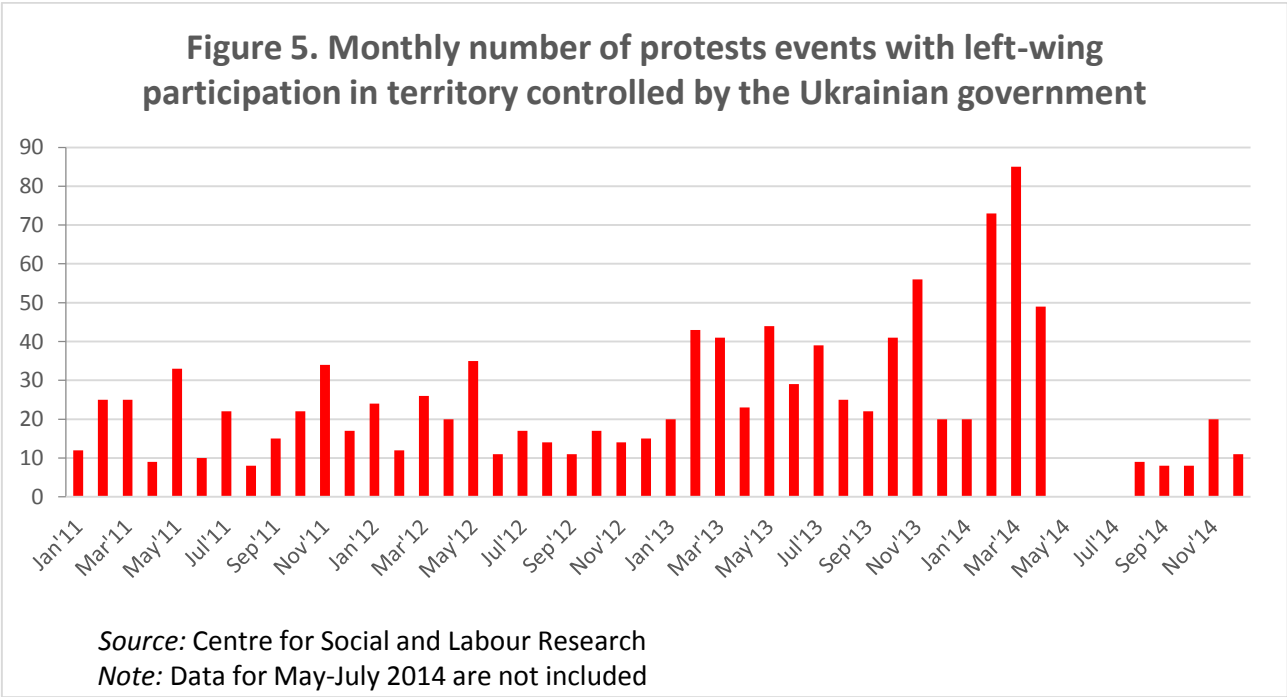
parliament passed a law condemning the communist and Nazi regimes, banning their propaganda and symbolism along with three others 'decommunisation' laws. There has been plenty of criticism against these laws from academic historians [239], international organisations, and human rights groups [240, 241] focusing on the effects on historiography, freedom of speech, and the absurd renaming of thousands of geographical objects in Ukraine. Specifically for the left, the law would require the CPU to change its name, symbols, rhetoric, party programme, and party newspaper titles, in order to retain its formal status as a political party. Although some pro-Maidan left-wing figures were trying to justify this law as if it concerned only 'Stalinists', in fact it bans the whole Bolshevik tradition, for example, outlawing positive mentions about establishing Soviet power in Ukraine starting from 1917. The laws will be widely used for selective political repression and not just in order to protect the feelings of the victims of Stalinism. For example, in September 2015 the Ministry of Justice warned a very small coach-party called Socialist Ukraine that their logo in the form of a stylised red star contained elements of totalitarian regime symbolism [242]. In the case of the new left, even if the state is not interested in persecuting marginal groups, the far right will be eager to create legal problems for them.

Loss of support, marginalisation and repression intensified internal conflicts within left-wing parties. Their illicit practice of inviting business people to join the party, essentially selling MPs' places in return for financial and other support, backfired now, when electoral prospects were bleak and even worse crackdowns were occurring. Those who saw party politics as mostly a continuation of their business started to leave the party. In late spring and summer 2014 a dozen MPs left CPU parliamentary group including Oksana Kaletnik, the richest woman in the parliament [243, p. 55]. Her cousin Igor Kaletnik, suspected of financing the party, was excluded from the CPU Central Committee. Some of the former communist MPs quickly joined a newly-formed faction 'For peace and stability' which was believed to have the financial backing of the Yanukovich 'Family' along with former Party of Regions members [244]. These exits were quickly exploited (and it might be equally possible that they were part of the plan) as a technical reason to disband the CPU parliamentary group, which the parliament's speaker Turchynov called a 'historic decision' and expressed the hope that 'communist factions will never again exist in the Ukrainian parliament' [245].

The SPU paid an even higher price. Its former sponsor, a businessman called Mykola Rudkovsky, took control of the party at the congress in June 2014 despite protests from many local organisations. The previous leader of the party, Petro Ustenko, is taking legal action against Rudkovsky in court over control of the leadership position and the party is fundamentally disorganised. Meanwhile the new left-of-centre party Socialists has been set up by Vasyl Tsushko, a former minister in Viktor Yanukovich's government [246] and received the support of many former SPU members.

These problems naturally led to a drop in party membership. For example, the data presented at the CPU congress in December 2014 showed a loss of almost 8,000 party members from 112,130 in the beginning of 2014 to 104,490 at the end of the year and more than 300 local organisations closed during the same period [247, pp. 191, 194]. It might not seem a big proportion overall; however, considering that out of those 112 000 many could be members only on paper and not active in party life at all, the loss of active membership was probably much more significant. The CPU also had to shrink its bureaucratic apparatus after loss of resources from the parliamentary group.

Protests on the part of the left also declined significantly. Between August and December 2014 in the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government, according to preliminary CSLR data, only 56 protest events with left-wing participation were reported in the space of five months (see Figure 5). This was in fact lower than the number of repressive actions or violent attacks against the left during the same period. The old left participated in 31 protest events (of which the CPU took part in 27). They organised many commemorative events, for example, on the anniversaries of the October revolution and certain anti-war, anti-government and social-economic-related events. The participation of the new left was reported at 25 events. These were exclusively protests on social-economic issues and not a single new left protest touched upon the war.



At the same time, not a single left-wing protest was reported in the areas under separatist control for the same period. Only one event with left-wing participation occurred in Russian-controlled Crimea. The Communists of Russia party organised a rally demanding that the government investigate the legitimacy of the Soviet Union's disruption and support the creation of a Eurasian Union.

Support for left-wing parties in the polls has also declined. According to the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, 2.6% of the respondents would have voted for the CPU in March 2015 (compared to the 3.9% of votes that they received in elections in October). In July support for the CPU declined to 1.9% in polls for the national elections and only 1% in polls for the local elections [248].

Calls to change party politics even came from the CPU leadership. Petro Symonenko in his talk to the CPU congress in December 2014, recognised deep problems with the ideological commitment of party members, the dominant focus on elections, and failures in trade-union and civic activities, and called for radicalisation of the party politics with the aim of leading the coming protest wave against the policies of the post-Maidan government [249]. A few months later he was repeating virtually the same things, recognising that the CPU had failed to change its strategy [250]. Symonenko repeated essentially the same proposals again in November 2015 after the disastrous results of the local elections [251]. While criticising the government as a 'national-fascist' regime but at the same time being unable to radicalise, the party was still not able to implement any substantially different politics other than electoral politics.

Of course, now that the decommunisation laws have been passed, electoral politics become more difficult. In July 2015 the Ministry of Justice banned the CPU and two marginal communist parties from participating in the upcoming local elections unless they changed their names and official symbols, and omitted any propaganda in favour of the 'criminal totalitarian communist regime' from their party statutes [252].

It seems that the CPU will change virtually nothing except for the party's media names. Following its ban from participation in the the local elections the CPU appealed to the European Court of Human Rights and its positive precedents in similar cases of anti-communist laws in other Eastern European countries [253]³⁵. In order to participate in legal activities, particularly in elections, the CPU and PSPU together with three minor parties including the openly Russian nationalist Kiev Rus party, founded the Left Opposition³⁶ organisation in June 2015. The Left Opposition mainly reflects the rhetoric of the CPU and PSPU, after Maidan only avoiding 'propaganda in favour of the criminal totalitarian regime'. There were some discussions in the party following the election failure about the mistakes of joining a coalition with the pro-Yanukovych Party of Regions and business people being invited to join the party whose approach was very different from communist ideology [249, 254]. However, Symonenko recently affirmed once more that there was allegedly nothing wrong in supporting the repressive laws of 16 January that fuelled the Maidan violence [255]. Likewise, there was no change to the essentially pro-Russian position with regard to

³⁵ On 16 December 2015, Kiev Administrative Court of Appeal confirmed the Ministry of Justice decision and banned the Communist party activities. - *13 January 2016*.

³⁶ Not to be confused with the new left group with the same name.

the conflict, and the choice of outspoken Russian nationalist allies within the Left Opposition coalition is very telling in itself.

Are there any prospects for internal change within the party? In the CPU, internal opposition was voiced by Spiridon Kilinkarov, a popular leader of the Lugansk province organization who in 2010 was only 21 votes from winning the mayoral elections in Lugansk. Kilinkarov criticized Symonenko for failing as a party leader who took a defensive and indecisive position at a difficult time for the party, whose personal rating was far below support for the party, who destroyed the strongest local cells for disloyalty and did not give enough support to repressed rank-and-file members [256]. He perceived the new Left Opposition initiative as an attempt on the part of Symonenko to stay afloat in Ukrainian politics while letting the CPU organisations lose their official status and die out. Despite many personal attacks and seemingly fair appeals to rejuvenate the leadership, Kilinkarov did not put forward any concrete proposals for substantial changes in the CPU position and politics.

The local elections held in October and November 2015 confirmed the tendencies of declining left support. The CPU was not allowed to participate as a party but the CPU candidates balloted from a technical party called the New State (*Nova derzhava*), a part of the new Left Opposition coalition. At the time of writing, all over Ukraine, on all level of the elections – from village to regional councils – only 182 the New State candidates got elected, i.e. 0.11 per cent from the total number of candidates [257], receiving all together around 1.3 per cent of the votes [258]. It was a hard blow to the party that only a few years ago had been the second popular party in southern and eastern Ukraine. For comparison 7,501 CPU candidates together with 216 village, towns and city heads got elected at local elections in 2010; it was the fourth result among all the parties [259]. Now only in Nikolayev province council it will be possible to form a *de facto* communist group. The new Socialists party, coming from the split from the SPU, performed only slightly better getting elected 185 candidates [257] compared to 3,046 candidates and 122 heads elected from the SPU in 2010 [259].

Even worse, a very large part of the CPU abstained from participating in the elections as candidates from the New State. Contrary to the CPU leadership decision the CPU organizations decided not to ballot to the regional councils in almost half of the provinces; in five (mostly Western) provinces the CPU did not participate in the elections on any level. More than two thirds of all district and city CPU organizations (441 from 665) did not participate in the elections [257]. In Kherson province the CPU organization splitted and balloted in two competing lists from the New State and from the marginal left party Left Forces Union led by businessman Vasyl Volga who was imprisoned for corruption during Yanukovych rule.

Poor results only exacerbated the internal conflicts. On 27 November 2015 the CPU central committee dismissed Spiridon Kilinkarov from the first secretary position of Lugansk province organization and fully disbanded the CPU Lugansk province committee [260]. Lugansk city organization did not accept this decision and issued a

strong anti-Symonenko statement connecting the future of the CPU with the change of the party leader but not proposing any structural or political reform within the party [261]. On 9 December 19 communist leaders from Kharkov, Lugansk, Zaporozhye, Kherson resigned from the CPU central committee protesting against repression of internal dissent and blaming Symonenko for the split and chaotic situation inside the party [262]³⁷.

It seems that the current direction of the old left is ultimately towards political death in Ukraine, something that the government's crackdowns will only help to accelerate. The new political projects on the left will obviously appear. At the moment the left-wing flank in Ukrainian politics is almost empty and this opportunity will inevitably be exploited by some of the competing elite groups. Probably the remnants of the dying old left parties or their splinter organizations will be involved in these new projects. However, it is unlikely that they will become the basis for a genuine left political party as a representative of Ukrainian underprivileged classes and progressive movements.

Although they had no problems with anti-communist hysteria in the separatist Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, the communists did not flourish in the non-democratic puppet-state regimes. In the DPR the former CPU people registered the Communist Party of Donetsk People's Republic (CPDPR) in October 2014 under the leadership of Boris Litvinov, the speaker in the DPR parliament at that time and a co-author of the DPR's declaration of independence. CPDPR (<http://kpdnr.ru>) became the first political party in the emerging state. However, they were not allowed to take part in the first elections of the DPR parliament. They were rejected under the pretext of a technical problem together with four other political blocs and civic movements. Only the Donetsk Republic led by Aleksandr Zakharchenko, the incumbent leader of DPR, and the Free Donbass movements were able to compete in the elections, not even hiding the fact that the results were tightly controlled [263]³⁸. All candidates from the CPDPR were again refused in registration for the the local elections in DPR (scheduled for October 2015 but postponed until 2016 in accordance with Minsk agreements). A discussion within the party followed that it might be 'forced' to go into opposition [264]. Nevertheless, very quickly Boris Litvinov stepped back and made clear that 'there is no need to go into deep opposition' [265]. As he said in an earlier interview, 'we are not in the opposition, we are the vanguard [of the republic]' [266]. The public activity of the party for almost the whole year, according to the official web-site [267], consisted exclusively of ritualistic activities on symbolic communist dates, *subbotniki* and the reconstruction of *pioneer* and *Komsomol* youth organisations. The party clearly exists only to support communist identity but not to engage in communist politics.

³⁷ On 19 December 2015 the CPU central committee excluded Spiridon Kilinkarov and Kherson local communist leaders from the party and dissolved nine local party organizations in Kherson province for 'anti-party' and disruptive actions. – 13 January 2016.

³⁸ However, the Donetsk Republic included communists into its electoral list. Litvinov together with several other communists became members of the DPR parliament.

Another organization competing for the remnants of the CPU membership is Donbass Union of Left Forces (<http://sldonbass.ru/>). The leader is Vladimir Bidevka who was the second secretary of the CPU Donetsk province committee, the chief editor of *Donbass Communist* newspaper. In 2012-2014 he was included onto a high position in the CPU electoral list and elected to the Ukrainian parliament. The CPU failed to get into the parliament after the next elections in October 2014 but in a week Bidevka was elected into DPR parliament at the last position in Zakharchenko's Donetsk Republic list [268]. Donbass Union of Left Forces political activity has been almost absent so far like of the CPDPR. They are even more loyal to Zakharchenko and slanderously attacked those humble talks from CPDPR about going into opposition [269, 270].

In the Lugansk People's Republic, on the one hand, the fighting with Ukrainian forces was usually less intensive and, on the other hand, rebel commanders like Mozgovoy were able to retain for longer their relative autonomy from the emerging state. The power of the local leader Igor Plotnitsky was shakier than the DPR's head Zakharchenko allowing slightly more outspoken opposition from the local communists. Still, by August 2015 the former CPU united into the Union of Communists in Lugansk region³⁹. The Union is allied with the CPDPR of Boris Litvinov and both structures are under the patronage of the Communist Party of Russian Federation – an important organiser of humanitarian aid to the DPR and LPR [271]. The more oppositionist centre of the Lugansk left is organised around the former All-Ukrainian Union of Workers – once the 'labour wing' of the CPU – which is cooperating with more radical and Stalinist Russian communist parties, the Western left and the Prizrak brigade.

While many former CPU members integrated into the structures of emerging separatist republics (as mentioned before, the whole CPU group in the Lugansk province council shifted to the LPR parliament), they are not even close to putting systematic pressure on the authorities. The most radical wing of the DPR/LPR left is centred around the Prizrak brigade but even they are putting state-building priorities higher than the furthering of the 'people's revolution'. In the DPR/LPR puppet-states under effective martial law, there is no space for independent left-wing politics, and only very few on the left there are even able to voice such a need.

Will a 'new left' alternative appear in Ukraine?

Borotba has gone 'underground' in territory under Ukrainian government control and does not do anything publicly except for graffiti of dubious propaganda value. Many leaders escaped to Crimea, some to Germany, many went to the DPR/LPR and joined Prizrak (not only as soldiers, Oleksii Albu is organising supply for the brigade). They update their websites less often now, though due to the Western sympathies they have garnered since 2014 almost every new publication is immediately translated into English. Though having no political perspectives in Ukraine at all unless the political

³⁹ Not yet a party as law on political parties still do not exist in LPR at the moment of writing.

regime here changes radically, Borotba became probably the most internationally well-known Ukrainian left-wing group, substantially influencing how the global left sees the events in Ukraine.

The left-liberal wing of the new left centring mostly around the Visual Culture Research Centre has distanced itself from left-wing politics to remain acceptable for the national-liberals. At the moment their political horizon is limited to support of micro-reforms and optimising neoliberal policies in cooperation with individual relatively progressive officials in the post-Maidan government.

The left-wing nationalists and anarchists are not showing signs of growth. The anarchists are proud that contrary to the 'authoritarian left' that 'lies about the fascist junta in Ukraine' they can still organize May Day demonstrations (though with many more security precautions than before) but these demonstrations gather the same number of people - 150-200 maximum - in Kiev. There are voices calling on anarchists to reconsider their strategy of organising small protests around local social-economic issues when there are many more urgent issues in the political agenda, and small peaceful rallies will not surprise anyone after the Maidan violence [272, 273] but in practice they cannot propose anything else other than to continue as the radical wing of the national-liberal movement. Some, like notorious Nihilist/AWU blogger Alexander Volodarsky, has renounced any left-wing and even anarchist identity at all reacting to an insufficiently anti-Russian position of the majority of Western leftists [274]. At the same time an implicitly pro-Ukrainian position in the anarchist movement is producing a critical response from within. For example, the 'Black Rainbow' group split from the Autonomous Workers Union, criticising some AWU activists for teetering on open xenophobia with claims about the 'collective responsibility' of the Russian people for the war, and the necessity for Ukraine to fight until victory is achieved and destroy the Russian state even with support of NATO [275]. In their own collective statement, Black Rainbow criticised the Ukrainian government for exploiting the war to justify anti-social measures; the statement evidently lacked any rhetoric about the 'progressiveness' of Ukraine in the conflict [276].

The Social Movement party (<http://rev.org.ua>) might be the most interesting initiative coming from the new left, which the author of this paper joined as well. It was founded in June 2015 uniting the Left Opposition (not to be confused with the Left Opposition of the CPU and PSPU), many left-wing intellectuals with several independent labour unions. The idea was to overcome the Maidan/Anti-Maidan split and unite workers of the Western and Eastern Ukraine around the struggle for their common class interests. A group in the party is working seriously on the creation of a scientifically-grounded economic programme for Ukraine's development as an alternative to neoliberal austerity recipes. The party's preliminary agenda-setting documents call for an immediate truce, for direct negotiations with participants of labour unions and civic associations from both sides and for the involvement of all

sides in the creation of the new Ukrainian constitution (for example, learning from Iceland's experience). These proposals are necessarily vague but still outline an anti-war position that argues against aligning with any side of the conflict. In the first statement the Social Movement strongly criticised assaults on civic rights and political freedoms by the Ukrainian government, not solidarising with the CPU and other parties under oppression but defending basic democratic liberties necessary for any left-wing activity and labour movement [277]. The main challenge for the party at the moment is to collect 10,000 signatures from at least two thirds of Ukrainian provinces to get the party formally registered. It remains to be seen whether people with very different views on recent political events and all the sensitive issues they produced will be able to work together and overcome the Maidan/Anti-Maidan split by themselves. At the time of writing activists with pro-Ukrainian pro-Maidan left background are more active in the party as they feel more interested in public left-wing politics in Ukraine. However, it is even more important for the future of the new left-wing party to see whether it can propose anything better than the social populist anti-oligarchic rhetoric exploited by almost any party in Ukraine and whether it can fill in with concrete substance the vague anti-war proposals without shifting to either of the conflicting camps but rather forming a visible alternative to both of them.

What can we expect in the near future? Social grievances against the government's policies are growing, together with tiredness of the war. They are still contained by patriotic mobilisation and beliefs that hardships are temporary and will be solved after appropriate 'reforms' are implemented, all of the politicians from Yanukovich's regime 'lustrated' and the politics 'de-oligarchised'. However, if mass social protests erupt in the near future, they are unlikely to be led by the left but rather by the far right or by the oligarchic opposition which might even create some fake 'pro-Ukrainian' left-wing project. Nevertheless, it is still possible to have legal left-wing political activity in Ukraine if it is not connected to separatism, Russian politics and the former government. Therefore, if it is well-organised and follows an independent strategy, the new left does have a chance at least to become a recognisable opposition movement in the wave of anti-government mobilisation.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LEFT

Why has no significant alternative emerged in Ukraine, capable of articulating the social grievances driving Maidan and Anti-Maidan supporters and common to all people in Western and Eastern Ukraine, to prevent them from being pushed towards nationalist and imperialist conflict? The new left that supported Maidan was simply too weak and disorganised to make any significant impact on the protest and became hardly more than voluntary supporters of right-wing leadership. The strongest left-wing organisations and parties reacting to the anti-communism of Maidan protesters took a distanced critical position and most of them effectively supported Yanukovich. They had more opportunities to struggle for hegemony in the Anti-Maidan movement

when in February and March 2014 it began to mobilise on a large scale and there were no strong political competitors. The armed separatist insurrection, started in April by Russian nationalists, initiated a completely different dynamic that the left were not ready for and in which, like the pro-Maidan left before them, they could not play an independent political role. At the same time they were not able to distance themselves clearly from the insurrection or from Russian politics and try to bridge the more progressive elements of the Anti-Maidan movement with those of the pro-Maidan movement on a common social-economic platform. The ensuing civil war polarised the positions of the Ukrainian left even further and crystallised pro-Ukrainian and pro-separatist positions, while the anti-war left have remained politically impotent. As a result the old left has lost electoral support, membership rates, all its MPs, and some of its resources, and has become a target of increased state repression and violent attacks from its opponents. It is moving steadily towards its own political death as a result of not being able to follow any alternative strategy. In the DPR/LPR opposition politics are practically non-existent, while the local left can at best only attract Western left-wing sympathies for the Donbass separatist cause.

Primarily, this is a result of the continuing degradation of the Communist Party of Ukraine. Since its origins the party has had the essentially conservative aim of restoring the Soviet order. As a result it has not been able to suggest proactive politics for progressive social change. Over time the CPU was becoming not just a socially conservative party but also politically and culturally conservative, not a class party but rather a regional Eastern Ukrainian party without prospects of becoming an all-national Ukrainian party, staying strangely attached to the legitimisation of Russian state interests. Whether and when the new left alternative will fill the gap of where the Ukrainian left once stood is still a big question that involves overcoming very significant organisational and ideological challenges.

Though there are many specific factors that led to the contemporary catastrophe of the Ukrainian left, there are also some that have much wider relevance. Discussions about Ukrainian events demonstrated very deep problems within the international left. The major lesson to be learned from Ukraine's crisis is how easily the left can be overtaken by the dynamics of competing imperialist and nationalist camps precisely at the moment when the left-wing alternative to both of them is necessary. At its heart it reflects the crisis of class analysis and class politics in the contemporary left. 'Anti-imperialists' completely lose the class dimension of the classical imperialism concept and are ready to support dictators without any progressive social agenda except that of their challenge to American hegemony. The liberal and libertarian left attack class-centric left-wing politics because of other 'equally important issues' up to the point where those 'equally important issues' become effectively the most important issues. In the imperialist conflict they are quick to surrender to neoliberalism 'with a human face' imbued with 'European values', with a better human rights record and advanced gender equality and ready to disregard the political economy dimension. Losing class politics Soviet and pro-Soviet communists

and contemporary 'anti-imperialists' easily disintegrate into the 'red and brown' conservative wing of Russian imperialism. Likewise, by 'overcoming' the 'old', 'reductionist' class perspective, the postmodern libertarian left reduce themselves to the 'black and brown' radical liberal wing of Western imperialism (as the Ukrainian left has proven, ready to support nationalist politics and repressive operations sometimes with even more cynical and cruel arguments than the mainstream public). 'Red and brown' and 'black and brown' hate each other but they do share many things in common, as explained by the 'brown' denominator. They share a quite similar vision of contemporary global order, only assigning opposing values: the postmodern objectively progressive 'Empire' overcoming reactionary parochial nation-states vs American imperialism where imperialism is only one, not a system of competing imperialist blocks, and thus every resistance to American hegemony is progressive. In the struggle against a greater reactionary evil, they are ready to approach right-wing allies, aligning with liberals against conservatives or vice versa. They are ready to disregard the differences between them and their right-wing allies as imagined pseudo-problems. 'Red and brown' may not see any political problem in gender inequality or human rights violations. 'Black and brown' similarly deny the importance of the loss of national sovereignty and other national problems, sometimes ignoring the issue of imperialism completely as a fake problem. Both fail to recognise the importance of all these problems, instead giving them a materialist interpretation and organically integrating them into anti-capitalist politics. The left needs a fundamental reconstruction of its own analysis based on materialist, and particularly class concepts, avoiding simply repeating what liberals say about gender and what conservatives say about national questions.

Obviously this is also a result of objective changes in the class structures of contemporary societies. A lot of theoretical work needs to be done to integrate migrants or various precarious workers into the framework of class analysis. However, not only analysis but a reformulation of the practical politics of the left is necessary. The left needs independent political organisations with organic links to the class base. Despite fashionable anarchist ideas about the effectiveness of network-like, completely horizontal movements without clear program, the Ukrainian failure has shown that the left is merely disbanded in critical moments. The disorganised left appears to be incapable of mobilising the forces needed for a strategic intervention in the right place and at the right time. The left also needs a social base in working collectives. Despite all the various structural changes, these are the people who can effectively stop the economy and are truly dangerous for the ruling class. Ukraine's experience has once more proved that a left-wing movement with its primary social base among the students of elite universities is impotent.

What could the European left do in relation to the conflict in Ukraine?

1. The left should not support either the Kiev government, or the separatists. Neither of them is a more progressive force from the socialist perspective.

2. Support anti-war opposition wherever it exists: in Ukraine, Russia, DPR/LPR other actors in the conflict.
3. A principled position against the far right both in pro-Ukrainian and separatist/pro-Russian camps is necessary in order to take the issue seriously and not be so easily accused of playing into the hands of the Ukrainian or separatist camps.
4. Support initiatives for dialogue and rebuilding Ukraine from the grassroots. Any solution to the crisis that ignores Ukraine's internal problems, which were exploited to fuel the conflict, will not be sustainable.
5. Support initiatives to unite workers of Western and Eastern Ukraine based on their class interests, against Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms and against EU/US and Russian imperialisms.
6. Mobilise against anti-communist initiatives, violations of human rights and repression of the left and independent social activists in Ukraine, Russia, DPR/LPR.
7. Support the cancellation or reduction or of Ukrainian foreign debt. In 2015 it is approaching the size of the Ukrainian GDP⁴⁰. As with Greece, this burden will soon block any possibility for development of the Ukrainian economy, perpetuating and aggravating social-economic problems with unemployment, corruption, degrading public institutions and infrastructure and others that lay behind the conflict in Ukraine.

14 December 2015

⁴⁰ See the basic information about Ukrainian debt in English here [298].

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