

The struggle for Ukraine

6 December 2013

The current wave of protests in Ukraine bears the label “Made in Germany,” “Made in the EU” and “Made in America.” The Western media has gone to great lengths to portray the demonstrations in Kiev as a struggle for democracy and the rule of law. In fact, they are part of a conflict over geostrategic issues. The aim is to repel Russian influence and subject Ukraine to the domination of Germany, the European Union and NATO.

Nine years ago, the Orange Revolution was organized with massive political and financial support from the US government and American NGOs such as the Open Society Institute of billionaire George Soros. These forces were able to annul the presidential election and ensure that the pro-EU and pro-US tandem of Viktor Yushchenko and Julia Tymoshenko took over as head of state and head of government in place of Viktor Yanukovich, who was considered to be in the pocket of Russia. The duo quickly fell out, however, and Yanukovich was able to assume the post of president in 2010.

Now another attempt is being made to bring a regime to power that will subordinate the former Soviet Republic and granary of the Russian Empire to the EU. An examination of the political leadership of the protests reveals their reactionary character. They are led by three parties, two of which have close relations with the conservative camp in the EU, while the third is openly fascist.

The *Batkivshchyna* (Homeland) party, led by the imprisoned Julia Tymoshenko, has observer status with the European People’s Party, the association of Europe’s Christian-Democratic and conservative parties. UDAR (Punch), headed by boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, who is a resident of Germany, is a creation of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its think tank, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The latter publicly advertises on its web site seminars devoted to the

political education of UDAR members.

According to a study entitled “The Extreme Right in the Ukraine” by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the third party, Svoboda (Freedom), is “the flagship of core extreme-right ideology.” The party’s original name was the Social-National Party of Ukraine. It used as its emblem a logo reminiscent of the Nazi swastika. On the advice of the French National Front (FN), with which it works closely, it decided on a less provocative name.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk (Homeland) and Vitali Klitschko appear at press conferences together with Oleh Tyahnybok from Svoboda. Tyahnybok is a neo-Nazi notorious for his ultranationalist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic outbursts.

Leading European and American politicians have expressed their solidarity with the protests in Ukraine. The same forces that have tacitly supported the brutality of police in mercilessly beating those opposing EU austerity policies in Athens, Madrid and elsewhere now proclaim their outrage at the brutality of the Ukrainian police.

US State Secretary John Kerry urged the Ukrainian government to “listen to the voice of their people,” while his German counterpart, Guido Westerwelle, intervened personally on Wednesday to mix with demonstrators in Kiev. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has demanded that the Ukrainian government guarantee the right to freedom of expression and assembly. The German government, which has just commenced new proceedings against the neo-fascist National Democratic Party of Germany, defends the right of Ukrainian fascists to demonstrate.

Though it is calling for the resignation of the president and new elections, the opposition does not enjoy the support of the majority of Ukrainians. A motion of censure against the government failed on Tuesday in parliament. The Association and Free Trade Agreement with the European Union that the

opposition wants to implement would have a devastating impact on large sections of the Ukrainian population.

The EU Agreement excludes simultaneous membership in a Russian-led customs union and would thus cut off Ukraine from its main trading partner, with which Ukraine's industry and transport routes are closely connected. The abolition of customs duties on European goods would also mean bankruptcy for many Ukrainian industries.

The terms of the agreement, which include the introduction of EU rules for labor market deregulation, the privatization of state enterprises and a reduction in the public debt, would have a social impact similar to the EU austerity programs imposed on Greece, Romania and other countries. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is already denying Ukraine a much-needed credit because the government refuses to hike the price of gas by 40 percent—a move that would inevitably result in the death of many unemployed people and pensioners unable to pay their heating bills.

The Association Agreement would turn the country into an extended workbench for German and European companies, which could produce at lower wage rates than those in China. At the same time, the country's natural resources, its vast and fertile landmass, and its domestic market of 46 million inhabitants make Ukraine a mouthwatering prospect for German and European businesses.

The agreement would also strengthen the EU's hand against Russia. A customs union or Eurasian Union comprising Russia and the Ukraine would have had a significantly stronger position in trade negotiations with the EU than an isolated Russia.

Germany, the EU and the US are pursuing not only economic, but also geopolitical, objectives in Ukraine. Given Russia's loss of influence in Eastern Europe since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the incorporation of Ukraine into the EU would push Russia off to the edge of Europe.

Since the end of the 18th Century, Ukraine formed an important part of the Russian and Soviet state. Moreover, the Russian Black Sea Fleet is located in Crimea at a port leased to Russia by Ukraine.

Both the US and the EU have an interest in weakening Russia, which is considered to be an important ally of China. Immediately after his election

in March, Chinese President Xi Jinping traveled to Moscow to strengthen the two countries' "strategic partnership." Both countries feel threatened economically and strategically by the aggressive incursions of the US and its allies in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

China is also expanding its economic links with Ukraine, which currently conducts about 5 percent of its foreign trade with China. In October, the *South China Morning Post* reported that the Chinese state-owned enterprise XPCC had struck a deal with the Ukrainian agricultural company KSG Agro to gain access to 100,000 hectares of arable land for the production of food for China. This area is to be expanded to three million hectares—the size of Belgium or Massachusetts.

China has already given the country loans of \$10 billion. Ukraine considers its economic relations with China to be so important that President Yanukovich set off on Tuesday for a four-day state visit to Beijing, despite the ongoing political crisis.

This is the background to the attempts by the EU and the German government to use the protests in Kiev to destabilize the Ukrainian government. Their initiative has been launched in tandem with the US, which is systematically expanding its military presence in Asia to encircle China and undermine its influence in the region. To this end, the US has massively intensified its pressure on China in recent weeks.

The offensive against Ukraine raises profound historical questions. In two world wars, Germany sought to bring Ukraine under its control and committed abominable crimes in the process. The current brazenness of the German government is fraught with new dangers. The growing international tensions can quickly turn into armed conflict.

This danger can be countered only by an independent movement of the international working class fighting for a united socialist Europe.

Peter Schwarz

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>