

Israel backs far-right coup in Ukraine

By Jean Shaoul
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The government of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is backing the fascist-led putsch that ousted Ukraine's elected pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich. Far from opposing anti-Semitism and defending Ukrainian Jews from the neo-Nazi parties that have joined the new coalition government, Israel is doing its best to deny that any such threat exists.

Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman issued an anodyne statement last week saying: "Israel is following the events in Ukraine with grave concern, worries for the safety of the Ukrainian people and hopes that the situation does not deteriorate and that no human lives are lost." This came just two days after Netanyahu's visit to Washington and, reportedly, after pressure from the US State Department for a public display of support for the new government in Kiev.

Both the government and media in Israel have responded by refraining from commenting on the growth of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic forces in Ukraine and the critical role they played in the Western-backed coup. They have downplayed or ignored entirely the fact that the US and the European powers had for months been financing and working with fascist organisations, such as the Svoboda party and the Right Sector, to bring down the Yanukovich regime. This is despite the fact that Svoboda leaders have made anti-Semitic public statements and the Right Sector's paramilitary forces dress in uniforms modelled on Hitler's Waffen SS and sport swastika-like emblems.

The unelected government, headed by Arseniy Yatsenyuk of the right-wing Fatherland Party, includes no fewer than six ministers from Svoboda, including deputy prime minister, general prosecutor and minister of defence. This is Svoboda's reward for providing many of the shock troops in the Maidan protests that overthrew Yanukovich.

Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, was appointed deputy head of the National Security and Defence Committee.

Less than a year ago, the World Jewish Congress called

for Svoboda, which glorifies Nazi collaborators who facilitated the massacre of Ukrainian Jews during World War II, to be banned. Svoboda's hero is the Ukrainian nationalist and pro-Nazi war criminal Stepan Bandera, leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (OUN), which aided the Nazis in the mass murder of Jews and Poles. The party's founder and leader, Oleh Tyahnybok, has spoken repeatedly of his determination to crush the "Russkie-Yid mafia that controls Ukraine."

It was previously considered impossible to completely avoid noting the menacing presence of these neo-fascist and anti-Semitic forces. They have launched attacks on Ukraine's Jewish community, which numbers around 200,000, mainly in Kiev, targeting synagogues.

As recently as February 22, the day of the putsch, Ukrainian rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman told Israel's *Ma'ariv* newspaper that he "had asked Kiev Jews to leave the city and, if possible, the country, due to fears that Jews might be targeted in the ongoing chaos.... Some Jewish shops have been vandalised and other threats to the Jewish community have been received."

The newspaper quoted Reuven as saying, "I don't want to tempt fate...but there are constant warnings concerning intentions to attack Jewish institutions." It reported that he had closed Jewish schools in Kiev due to the violence.

On February 25, Israel's *Ha'aretz* reported that triumphant demonstrators were "flying flags with neo-Nazi symbols" and "distributing freshly translated editions of *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Independence Square."

Leaders of the Ukrainian Jewish community contacted Israeli foreign minister Lieberman, who comes from Moldova, to ask for help. The Israeli government neither responded to the request nor issued a statement. Nor did it offer financial support for the hospital care of nine Ukrainians sent to Israel after being seriously injured during recent rioting. The Jewish Agency offered a paltry \$5,000.

In the main, Israel is minimising all such concerns. The *Jerusalem Post*, for example, wrote February 24 that

there is “no information of Jews being targeted as of yet,” before asserting that “Jewish institutions are under self-imposed lock-down”. It added that there is no “defined threat against them.”

Last week, some leading members of Ukraine’s Jewish community published a highly critical open letter to Russian president Vladimir Putin saying that “even the most marginal” forces involved in the revolution “do not dare show anti-Semitism or other xenophobic behaviour.” They asserted their support for Ukrainian sovereignty “in the name of national minorities and Ukraine’s Jewish community.”

Most extraordinarily, Netanyahu’s visit to Washington followed a meeting between Israel’s ambassador to Ukraine, Reuven Din El, and Right Sector head Yarosh. The embassy gave this fascist its stamp of approval, stating on its web site: “Dmytro Yarosh stressed that Right Sector will oppose all [racist] phenomena, especially anti-Semitism, with all legitimate means.”

There are, in addition, reports of Israeli involvement in the opposition-led riots. According to the Jewish News Agency (JTA), a former Israeli army officer played a leading role in the protests, commanding a group of about 40 Ukrainian militants and five Israelis, known as the Blue Helmet unit, under the direction of Svoboda. Four other Israeli veterans, who had been born in Ukraine, migrated to Israel and served in the Israeli army before returning to Ukraine, took part in the opposition rallies.

It is not known whether the Blue Helmet group was working under the direction of forces in Israel. But its leader said, “I don’t belong [to Svoboda], but I take orders from their team. They know I’m Israeli, Jewish and an ex-soldier. They call me ‘brother’.” He added, “What they’re saying about Svoboda is exaggerated. I know this for a fact. I don’t like them because they’re inconsistent, not because of [any] anti-Semitism issue.”

The *Jerusalem Post* reported last December that “some young Jews working for international organisations such as JDC, Hillel and Limmud have taken to the barricades [in Ukraine]” and were “really active in offering support as well as organising the barricades.”

The Zionist state, whose self-proclaimed *raison d’être* is the defence of the Jewish people against anti-Semitism, now gives unalloyed support to a European government in which for the first time since 1945 an avowedly anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi party controls key levers of state power.

Israel’s response to the crisis in Ukraine testifies to the fact that the Israeli ruling elite speaks not for world

Jewry, as it likes to claim, but for Israel’s capitalist class, a corrupt and venal social layer that carries out criminal attacks on Palestinians and others in alliance with Washington. The 20 wealthiest Israeli families control about half the stock market and 25 percent of the major corporations, notably the newspapers, banks and high-tech companies. A number of these oligarchs came from Russia and the former Soviet republics, having made their money through the privatisation of state-owned enterprises.

This class has long allied with fascistic forces outside Israel to defend its interests, most notably with the Phalange movement in Lebanon during the civil war of 1975-1989. More recently, it has shown no qualms in supporting, training and working with right-wing Islamists funded by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the CIA in an attempt to topple President Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria. Neither is Israel opposed to coups, having worked even more closely with Egypt since the July 2013 military coup than it did during the Mubarak era.

At home, as the gap between rich and poor has grown due to the economic policies pursued by governments of the right as well as the nominally “left,” the state has increasingly relied on right-wing settlers and extreme nationalist zealots, who provide the basis for the emergence of fascistic tendencies within Israel itself. It has fostered nationalism to divert the anger of the working class over declining living standards and social inequality along reactionary lines.

These developments show that far from defending the Jews from oppression and anti-Semitism, the Zionist state is complicit in that oppression and in the re-emergence of anti-Semitism.

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