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Ukraine

For an independent social movement! For a free Ukraine!

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The mass killing of people in Odessa on 2 May cannot be justified in any way. The socialist union Left Opposition is convinced that “Whoever the deceased people on both sides are, the force used against the majority of them clearly exceeded any needed exercise of it in self defence. It is necessary to undertake an all-sided investigation of these events and to personally expose the provocateurs and the killers, who more than likely appeared there from all sides of the confrontation”.

We are unable at the present time to name the people responsible for these murders, their organisations or groups. However, we can see the political consequences of the Odessa massacre and we cannot but see that left wing political organisations are among those that carry political responsibility for it.

Without a doubt the violence was directed and organised in the first instance by ultranationalist and chauvinist groups who quite consciously kill people and try to exploit the blood of the deceased to whip up bestial nationalist hysteria in society, which to their way of thinking should “mobilise the nation” against its “its enemies”. Really, that is perhaps the only way to achieve their dreamed-of nazi dictatorship, which can be established only through bloodletting and the intimidation of people. This will become possible only if in Ukraine Russians will see a Banderite murderer in every Ukrainian, while Ukrainians will see in every Russian a potential “saboteur from Russian Military Intelligence”. Unfortunately, we have come far too close to the boundary beyond which this can really happen.

However, there appeared in Odessa on 2 May on opposing sides of the barricades people, including activists of left wing organisations, who only a year ago were making part in common protests against restrictions on the freedom to assemble peacefully and against the introduction of an enslaving Labour Code. Activists of the “Borot’ba” (Struggle) union appeared on the side led by the right wing chauvinists of the “Odesa druzhina” (Odessa Guard). On the other side anarchists and anti-fascists took part in actions that were actually directed by their opponents, in particular the right wing football ultras. The latter group distinguished themselves by their particular brutality against opponents.

The left organisations were unable to put forward an independent, distinct working class programme. To say nothing of not being unable to take the lead of a mass movement, they did not distance themselves, nor even manage to retrain the masses of people from fratricidal violence under nationalist slogans. These leftists ended up in the snare of uncritical support for a relatively large movement which in recent times has almost completely departed from the socio-economic order of the day and changed it into a nationalist one. At that moment for the protesters in Odessa the ability or inability, in the last instance the right, of the Ukrainian state to exist unfortunately carries more weight than the labour rights of the Ukrainian working class of all nationalities. Instead of a strategy to remove the capitalist oligarchies from power in Ukraine and Russia there is a discussion under way as to whether the creation of a Ukrainian state was a “misunderstanding” or “a historical mistake”.

Its no surprise that by and large the workers of the big factories in Eastern and Central Ukraine are not taking part in mass protest actions. Anti-Maidan and pro-Maidan actions are on the whole poorly attended and in no way can they be compared to the one-hundred-thousand strong mobilisations of Kievans during the Euro-Maidan in January and February this year. Armed radicals remain a small group of adventurists even in Sloviansk, where they have seized power and clearly are holding on only by intimidating the local population who quite logically don’t want to become the victims of the Anti-Terrorist Operation of the Government.

It is very doubtful whether a majority of the residents of Sloviansk support the monarchist idea of resurrecting “the one and indivisible” (Russia –translator), which is openly proclaimed by the Russian officer Strelkov-Hirkin, “commander-in-chief” of the Donetsk People’s Republic. At the same time it is clear that neither do they want to see in Sloviansk the “little green men” of Strelkov nor any other soldiers. After all, they understand only too well that with the continuation of the Anti-Terrorist Operation fighting will start sooner or later in the inhabited homes of the town and they will be the first to suffer – the peaceful local inhabitants.

The workers of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk by and large are not taking part in the stand-off, but continue each day to drive through the checkpoints to work. The question of a general strike has not even been raised here. Local lumpen-criminal gangs and old people who dimwittedly pine with nostalgia for the USSR are the main supporters of the “Sloviansk junta”.

At the same time a mass organised workers movement is present without a doubt in Ukraine. It has appeared in Kryviy Rih when the miners’ self defence brigade prevented the escalation of violence in that city during the attempts by “titushky” (thugs hired by the authorities and employers – translator) to attack the local Maidan. The workers showed themselves also in Chervonohrad, Lviv oblast, where they intervened in the political process and then de-facto nationalised the local electricity power station, which belongs to Rinat Akhmetov, the oligarch.

The workers movement has shown itself even more powerfully in Krasnodon, Luhansk oblast. During a general strike here the miners took the city under their control. It is significant that they did not want to ally themselves with the Luhansk separatist “anti-Maidan”, nor did they declare support for the bourgeois oligarchic leaders of the Kyiv Maidan. They had their own Maidan, of the workers, armed with slogans for social justice and seriously intent on realising these slogans, unlike the Kyiv Maidan. The workers were demanding not only an increase in their wages, but also an end to outsourcing for supplementary workers in the mines. Thus it was not a narrowly economic strike, but a movement that raised the need for solidarity between workers of different skills, a movement sufficiently powerful to take the whole city under its control. And in doing that there was no violence, there were no casualties or victims! The city was taken not only without a single shot fired, but without anyone offering even half hearted resistance.

Understandably, a workers’ movement organised on a national scale is still very weak. Truly active, class conscious workers’ unions are concentrated in a few centres of the mining industry. However, it is also the case that only where the workers really intervene in a confrontation that it becomes possible to avoid mass casualties and to calm down chauvinistic hysteria.

Indeed, the emergence into the political arena of an independent, class workers’ movement remains perhaps the last chance for the survival of today’s Ukrainian state and the prevention of a civil war which is unfolding before our very eyes. If the scenarios of dismemberment of Ukraine come to pass we will not be able to avert an explosion of violence and massive casualties. Alongside that the confrontation will assume more and more an international and interethnic character, not at all a class one. When the war in Yugoslavia was only just beginning the ultra-right forces were also very weak and marginalised. They had no more support in society than Yarosh and Tiahnybok, with their microscopic ratings, have today. However, less than a year into the war Serb and Croat nazis started to dominate in the Yugoslav political arena and turned themselves into big mass organisations.

If the miners of Luhansk, Donetsk, Lviv and Dnipropetrovsk regions cannot by their joint efforts stop this war we will all be dragged into its meat grinder. In that event a left movement in Ukraine will truly be destroyed for many years to come. It is doubtful whether it will survive in Russia either.

Workers of Krasnodon and Kryviy Rih urgently need your solidarity and support! The Krasnodon strike has not ended, but only been suspended during negotiations. In Kryviy Rih the miners are also preparing to strike in the

event their demands are not met.

No support to chauvinists regardless of the flags under which they stand!

For an independent and united workers' Ukraine!

For an independent workers and social movement!