



Ukraine votes: fascists enter mainstream

K D Tait Thu, 06/11/2014 - 14:20

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Negotiations to form a government are underway after parliamentary elections held on 26 October delivered an overwhelming majority for pro-EU parties. The widespread boycott of the elections in the Eastern regions resulted in a nationwide turnout of just 51 per cent. The two rebel regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, with 27 seats, did not participate. This is the first time since the restoration of capitalism that Ukraine's parliament will not have a sizeable representation of MPs from the South and East.

The President's 'Bloc Poroshenko' took 21.82 per cent of the vote and was narrowly beaten by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's 'People's Front' with 22.14 per cent. However, the mixed electoral system of party lists elected on the basis of proportional representation and single-member constituencies means that 'Bloc Poroshenko' is likely to have around double the number of seats as the People's Front.

Of the remaining parties which cleared the five per cent threshold necessary to win parliamentary representation, three are also pro-western parties. Samopomich (Self Help) Union, led by the Mayor of the western capital Lviv, polled third at 10.97 per cent while the Radical Party led by ultra-nationalist Oleh Lyashko, scored 7.44 per cent. Yulia Tymoshenko's *Batkivshchyna* (Fatherland) party scraped in with 5.68 per cent.

The nationalist party of Oleh Lyashko returned several fascists and ultra-nationalists to parliament on its ticket, including Ihor Mosiychuk, Azov battalion commander and activist with the neo-Nazi Social-National Assembly, and Yuriy Shukhevich, son of the Nazi war criminal Roman Shukhevich. Lyashko himself is associated with the Azov battalion, and stands accused by Amnesty International of organising kidnap and torture.

The 'Opposition Bloc' led by former Party of Regions and Yanukovich supporters polled just 9.42 per cent.

The Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) which won 7 per cent of the vote in the 2012 elections, failed to cross the threshold with just 3.87 per cent. The KPU has been the subject of a campaign of state persecution by the Ukrainian government, with its parliamentary fraction dissolved and its members killed and kidnapped by paramilitary forces during the elections.

Sham democracy

The so-called Maidan 'revolution' was carried out by a coalition of forces under slogans promoting the virtues of a break with Russia and the adoption of 'European values'. Some of these forces, like Vitaly Klitschko's UDAR party, were open neoliberal proxies for EU imperialism. Others, like Tymoshenko's Fatherland party, had a more ambivalent relationship with the EU. Some, like the fascist Svoboda and Right Sector, not only opposed the EU as a new potential oppressor of Ukraine but were also openly hostile to many so-called 'European values', like LGBT rights, which they view as alien to Ukrainian culture.

The mass abstention in the East delivered a win for parties committed to closer integration with the EU and Nato. The EU and USA naturally welcomed the result of the elections. The spirit in which the elections were called can be summed up by President Poroshenko's statement that the snap elections were necessary in order to 'purge' the parliament of 'traitors'. He welcomed the result of the elections by saying 'at last there will be no more communists in the parliament.'

The purpose of the elections was to return a parliament which contained only token opposition. To achieve this, opposition parties were subjected to a campaign of repression by fascists colluding with police. In large parts of the south-east, which are under military occupation by fascist paramilitary groups, opposition meetings were broken up and activists harassed. The KPU found it almost impossible to campaign openly.

On 18 September, a KPU rally against the war and price rises was attacked by ultras from football teams. On 27 September a 'March for Peace' called by the KPU was banned and then attacked by fascists. In a parallel with events following the May 2 Odessa massacre, those attacked by fascists were themselves rounded up and arrested by police.

The 'European values', which the leaders of the Maidan coup were so keen to adopt, turn out to be the values of the European ruling class, which will support any force which is capable of delivering its interests. In this case its interests are to bloc with the USA against Russia and impose austerity on Ukraine. The two figureheads, Poroshenko and Yatseniuk, reflect the differing aims and objectives of the EU and the USA, respectively. To date, they have collaborated to deliver common interests, but it is only a matter of time before they discover that, while imperialisms have permanent interests, they never have permanent friends.

Fascists enter mainstream

The main fascist party, Svoboda, saw a decrease in its vote, a result of the swing towards the People's Front which adopted much of the fascists' violently Russophobic rhetoric and ran on an ultra-nationalist 'war party' platform, with several neo-Nazi 'volunteer battalion' commanders running on its ticket.

The overtly neo-Nazi 'Right Sector', a coalition of fascist groups, won 284,802 votes. In the 2012 election, its largest component UNA-UNSO won just 16,937 votes.

Together, the fascist parties took more than one million votes, but failed to cross the threshold. Although their representation in parliament will be limited to leaders elected in single-member constituencies, their real influence lies in their control of the key levers of the state apparatus.

Yuri Michalchyshyn, a Svoboda party ideologue, who holds an honorary medal of the SS Galicia division, called for the Ukrainian air force to turn Slavyansk into a 'lunar landscape', described the holocaust as a 'particularly bright period in European history' and founded 'the Joseph Goebbels Political Research Center', quit Svoboda to become head of the propaganda and analysis department of the Ukraine Security Service, SBU.

When Right Sector leader Borislav Bereza stated that the Kiev police will begin 'cooperation' with the Right Sector, he was simply confirming as policy a situation that has de facto operated across large parts of Ukraine since the Maidan coup.

We can expect there to be no shortage of voices trying to present the election results as proof not only that Kiev is now a fully functioning parliamentary democracy but that the forces that deposed the previous regime were never as reactionary as some argued.

Identifying such stories as 'Putin's conspiracy theory?', John Lloyd, of the Financial Times, writing in his blog on Reuters website on October 31st, concluded, 'More than 40 percent of the vote in this past weekend's parliamentary elections in Ukraine went to two liberal, pro-European parties, one headed by President Petro Poroshenko, the other by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. A third party, the Lviv-based Samopomich (Self-Help) Party, also strongly pro-European, polled more than 10 percent. Only one party that could be accurately labelled far right, the Radical Party, exceeded the 5 percent threshold necessary to win parliamentary seats.'

Given that Mr Lloyd is generally well-informed, this can only be regarded as itself a highly pernicious interpretation. In fact, popular support for far-right and fascist solutions to Ukraine's economic and social crisis have become increasingly popular, at least among the 50 per cent who turned out to vote.

As we wrote in our last article, Yatseniuk's People's Front party is a coalition of oligarchs and commanders of the 'volunteer battalions', including several prominent neo-Nazis. Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, was elected in the Dnipropetrovsk region, after the People's Front deputy withdrew in his favour. Andriy Parubiy, founder of the neo-Nazi Social-National Party (now Svoboda) is also a prominent member.

The electoral strategy of the People's Front was aimed at coopting the support base of the overtly fascist groups who played a prominent role in both the Maidan coup and the punitive war against the rebel regions in the southeast of the country. Until shortly before the elections, Yatseniuk's party was trailing Poroshenko's in the polls but in the last two weeks his emphasis on the need to renew the war against the 'rebel regions' had the intended effect of convincing potential voters for the openly fascist parties to swing their support to the People's Front.

Under the pressure of a civil war prosecuted in an atmosphere of extreme Russophobia, anti-communism and ultra-nationalism, the political centre of Ukraine has moved far to the right. The integration of many of the fascist leaders into the state apparatus has not tamed their politics but rather reduced the appeal of an explicitly fascist electoral choice. After all, if the fascists are able to take prominent jobs in the security services and run on the Prime Minister's ticket, then it matters less what label they take as against the politics they endorse.

Some decisions taken immediately following the election expose the way in which fascists have allied with western-backed 'mainstream' politicians to increase their influence in the state machine:

The deputy commander of the neo-Nazi 'Azov Battalion', Vadym Troyan, a member of the 'Patriots of Ukraine', the Social-National Assembly's paramilitary organisation, was appointed head of the Kiev region police by Interior Minister Arsen Avakov. Avakov is a leading member of Yatseniuk's People's Front. Troyan announced he would work closely with Andrey Biletsky, commander of the Azov battalion and newly-elected member of parliament on the list of... Yatseniuk's People's Front.

Rebel regions vote

The civil war in Ukraine, which has seen the Luhansk and Donetsk regions fighting for autonomy from Kiev, has killed over 4,000 people. Large parts of those regions are occupied by fascist paramilitary forces, who are accused of widespread looting, kidnapping and murder by the local population. Although the 5 September ceasefire agreement, which followed on from the defeat of the Azov battalion by local paramilitaries, put an end to all-out fighting, hundreds of soldiers and civilians have been killed since, as Kiev forces around Donetsk airport continue to shell the city.

It is no surprise, therefore, that turnout across large parts of the east and south was less than 40 per cent. It is equally unsurprising that the two rebel regions, which spent months under siege by the Ukrainian army, refused to take part in elections under such conditions.

Voters in Luhansk and Donetsk went to the polls on 2 November to elect representatives in elections that Ukraine's western allies condemned as illegitimate. Of course, it is true that elections carried out during a war are unlikely to meet all the criteria of normal bourgeois democracy. However, as Borotba pointed out, 'All TV channels showed the huge queues at polling stations of DPR and LPR. Such high turnout in elections in Donbass indicates that, despite all the hardship of war, the local people are still loyal to their choice, made in independence referendums on May 11'. The turnout of voters in DPR and LPR evidently presents a sharp contrast with the boycott of the parliamentary elections in South-East Ukraine, which is still under the control of the nationalist Kiev regime.'

It should also be remembered that the government which started the civil war was a self-appointed regime which seized power in a fascist-backed putsch and, as we have seen, the October elections to the Verkhovna Rada hardly satisfied even the most basic requirements of 'European democracy'.

In the elections, Aleksandr Zakharchenko was elected head of the Donetsk People's Republic with around 75 per cent of the vote and Igor Plotnitsky was elected head of the Luhansk People's Republic with around 63 per cent. In the parliamentary elections, Zakharchenko's Donetsk Republic Party claimed victory with around two thirds of the vote

against its rival the Sovobniy Donbass party. Plotnitsky's Peace to Luhansk Region movement claimed victory with 69 per cent against 22 per cent for the Luhansk Economic Union, a pro-business party of local entrepreneurs and industrialists which advocates closer economic links with the Russian market.

Quite apart from limitations on electoral activity caused by war, there were other features which are politically disturbing. Again, we think Borotba is right to draw attention to these, 'Particularly alarming is the exclusion of the Donetsk Communists from the election campaign. The elections in the republics reveal that the original pro-democracy, anti-fascist and anti-oligarchic direction of the uprising in Donbass is under threat. There are some influential forces (and not only in Donbass), which would not want the example of an anti-capitalist and grass-roots democracy to be expressed. There are some forces in Donbass which actively try to replace the anti-oligarchic and anti-fascist tendencies of the popular uprising - with some medieval archaic relics to divert the energy of the masses into a safe direction for the old elites.'[http://borotba.su/on the elections in the donetsk and lugansk peoples re...](http://borotba.su/on_the_elections_in_the_donetsk_and_lugansk_peoples_re...) [1]

Socialists would certainly have welcomed a left challenge from an explicitly workers' party standing on a programme of unequivocal rejection of nationalism, expropriation of the big capitalists, defence of national and social minority rights, a secular government, the defence of women's rights and the extension of the social struggle throughout Ukraine for a united socialist state.

However, the idea that an open opposition of pro-Kiev, pro-Maidan forces within the two republics could be tolerated in a civil war is a utopian fantasy and a concession to the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy. Such forces would present a 'fifth column' or vanguard of the counter-revolutionary forces who are trying to destroy the regions and deny the people their right to determine their own future.

In the wake of the elections to the Kiev parliament, the people of Donetsk and Luhansk must remain vigilant that the government there does not renew its offensive. At the same time, the watchword must equally be 'watch your leaders'. The greatest danger is that the economic collapse brought about by the war creates intolerable pressure for open Russian intervention.

Clearly the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics cannot survive on their own or even within the mooted 'Novorossiya Union'. Accepting de facto or total incorporation into the Russian state, economically or militarily, would be the death of the embryonic social struggle opened up by the working class' resistance to fascism and the oligarchs.

Conclusion

The general elections in Ukraine exposed the fault lines in Ukrainian society. The social crisis brought about by the world economic crisis and the IMF imposed austerity will only further entrench these divisions. However, they will also create new ones within the masses still under direct rule from Kiev.

Capitalism and the competing national solutions, of the Ukrainian and Russian chauvinists, or even the parochial 'Donbass regionalism', offer not liberation but only heavier chains for the people of Ukraine. The road to peace for the people of Luhansk and Donetsk lies down the road of social revolution carried out by the working class across Ukraine.

The boycott of the election shows a massive number of people reject the parliamentary process in Ukraine. The spread of mutinies within the conscript forces and mothers' protests in the west shows a reluctance to pursue the fratricidal war fought on behalf of the capitalists.

The workers of the Donbass region remain in the vanguard of the social struggle against the imposition of neoliberal austerity and incorporation in the EU bosses' club and Nato imperialist alliance.

They, more than anyone else, have the opportunity and the responsibility to demonstrate the way forward for the Ukrainian working class by deepening and extending the social struggle. In particular, they need to organise democratic councils of workers' delegates in the workplaces, towns and countryside to organise both the production and distribution of resources and the military resistance.

Above all, they must appeal for support in this struggle from the working class across Ukraine, insisting on workers' power and socialism across Ukraine, Europe and Russia as the only antidote to the barbarism of any solution reached on the basis of agreement or conflict between the capitalist powers.

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Links:

[1] http://borotba.su/on_the_elections_in_the_donetsk_and_lugansk_peoples_republics.html