

Ukraine: A Harsh Antifascist Confrontation Awaits Us

Why the leftist forces in Ukraine do not show their presence on the Maidan

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– People say that in this tent anarchists stay. They've been sitting there for several days, do not go out, they are afraid .

– What? Don't they go out at all?

– Well, no. They go out but very rarely. People say, they were allowed to stand their tent after they built a barricade – activists on the Kiev streets share local gossips.

”Probably they have been beaten five times”

It is talk about one of dozens of military tents on Chreszczatyk. The tent doesn't distinguish itself with anything. But the neighboring one is decorated with posters with portraits of Nestor Makhno and slogans “Freedom or death! “, ” Mother Anarchy ” and ” Life is a struggle”. The fact that the author of these posters, an artist Andrej Jermolenko from Kiev, as seen from his other work rather not have anarchist ideas – in particular, taking into account his work of 2012, ” The crisis of multiculturalism ” depicting Anders Breivik in a knight's armor. Makhno, from a hero of the revolution, is gradually transformed into a national hero. A documentary about “Daddy” was shown on a huge screen next to the stage on the Maidan at night on January 26.

“Still in November and December, when the Euromaidan has a prefix “euro” for genuine reasons, not from the force of inertia, a part of our leftists came out here with socialist, feminist and LGBT slogans. The other part of these leftists warned: do not go, you'll be beaten. They were. Probably five times – says an anarchist and antifascist from Kiev who wish to remain anonymous. She mentions, in particular, an attack on a tent of leftist activists in Chreszczatyk in early December.

” The activists were attacked by more than thirty of the Nazis, who rushed at them with crying “slatters!” Alexander Levin got a broken nose, Denis Levin was treated with gas, Anatoly got broken ribs. A tent of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine was cut with knives. The Nazis smashed a sound equipment, and stole generators” – Sergey Kiriczuk, an activist of a Marxist organization “Borot'ba” (“Struggle”), described then the attack on his comrades. He noted that the conflict was watched by a deputy from the nationalist party Svoboda, Igor Miroshnichenko. Later Denis Levin confirmed that they were invaded by “elements close to Svoboda”.

Around that time, also feminists from the Feminist Offensive were treated with gas. In the words of an activist of the Left Opposition (LO), Nina Potarskaya, the feminists came out a few times on the Maidan along with LO. “The people of Svoboda came to us, sprayed gas and stole some posters. The posters were related to maternity leave.” – says Potarskaya. After some time, during the second action, feminists got with gas again.

A volunteer in one of Kiev hospitals, Viktoriya Teologova, says that the first response of the Ukrainian leftists to Maidan was rather negative because of the abundance of nationalist rhetoric and the participation of the extreme right. The situation changed, however, by obvious arbitrarily actions of the Police and the law adopted on January 16 – activists joined in volunteering, supporting the Maidan as a resistance against the impending dictatorship. Viktoriya does not identified herself with any movement, stating that she prefers to deal with a antiauthoritarian leftists.

In addition, in the activists' environment of Kiev, there is a rumor about a tactical truce between right-wing and left-wing radicals, set during the active confrontation with the police – in street battles with the Berkut, in one row with extreme right-wing football supporters, the ultras of Arsenal, known for their anti-fascist views, participated. “Regarding the truce with the Right Sector – we did not made it, but there is a rumor that the football supporters made it for the time of

the existence of the common enemy. Sadly, the same day that right-wingers beat Lewin brothers.” – stated Kiev anarchist Alexander Ganner, one of the founders of the initiative Black Maidan.

“They prefer to not push themselves to the right-wingers. There is no truce as such, however, due to the considerable amount of libertarian-minded people involved in the filtration of public rhetoric, no conflicts arise ” – ads Theologova.

“Currently, when day bad day the dogs (i.e. cops) really go mad, it doesn’t come to anyone’s mind to settle feuds between them – because, without penetrating the matter, they are regarded as provocateurs and separated, and also because the enemy now is one. Due the legislation, we can not fart quietly, and for standing on the street they shoot at us, not looking at who is behind the red-black horizontal [flag] of UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and who behind the red-black diagonal one of the anarchists” – adds a anonymous interlocutor of Kiev anarchist environment.

In the main hall of the conquered building of the Kiev City Hall, a huge portrait of Bandera and Svoboda’s flags hang. In the corner we can see one another flag – the Celtic cross. On the wall of one of the corridors, the words ” Russians with you! ” And again the Celtic cross. Surprisingly, among stickers of Svoboda, the European anarchist one “Fuck the Police” appears. Then it turns that they themselves stick it, already in December. Many Kiev anarchists are currently on duty in hospitals – in addition to the normal duties of medical volunteers they also care about the safety of the injured in street clashes. Theologova says that the police may detain an activist, even when he is given first aid. This is a pervasive practice – she is indignant.

“Anarchists are on some barricades and in stores of hundreds (brigades of one hundred) of Samoobrona (The Self-Defence), autonomous anarchists appear on the first line, but so far everything looks pretty chaotic – most of them in small groups and does not coordinate their activities with others in any way, not marking their presence, unless the by graffiti” – says Ganner .

In the center of town, anarchists controlled at least one barricade- near the metro station “Khreschatyk “. In the words of Ganner, a group of eco-anarchists worked there under the name “Free Earth”. *“The people were handing out leaflets, sticking stickers, doing graffiti, but their activities, with the time, disappeared totally”* – clarifies the activist.

“Moderate anarchists and libertarian leftists are trying to join the movement, to exert somehow an effect on it, but in the same time not distinguishing themselves specially. To not go beyond the general framework of discourse, to apply hints gently . They do not want to talk about a national revolution , but restrain themselves of any other.” – concludes Ganner.

“At a time when the Right Sector, which from the beginning maintained its subjectivity, symbolism and ideology, managed to become a significant force and to attract to their site a lot of new people, the leftists who tried to not call themselves leftists simply vanished into the general mass”- believes an anarchist and art activist Aleksandr Wołodarskij, admitting that the leftist movement of Ukraine is in the fall.

“Unfortunately, there are many leftists who add scores for nationalism. Some fans of Arsenal allied with the autonomous nationalists, also some activists LO allied with them, and “Borot’ba” likes to remember activities, in 20s of XX c., of the so-called national communists, in a kind of Skrypnyk conducting the policy of ukrainization” – complains Ganner.

“The current revolution as any violent social process is incompatible with personal security – it’s obvious. I am ready to sacrifice my health and my contractual freedom for the cause, but for sure not for some shit, and all above-mentioned, forgive me, indicate it. – comes to the conclusion the anarchist.

Peculiarities of the leftist euro-integration

In the leftist and trade union environment of Ukraine there is no single assessment of the occurring events and an action plan. In the words of activists *“all variants of events are considered, including a civil war.”* Cooperating with each other, participating in street resistance, the leftists do it on their own initiatives rather. All they agree in one point – now you can not simply disperse to homes. After the adoption of the laws of January 16, the protests against the regime of Yanukovich were supported virtually by all left-wing forces.

The Socialist Left Opposition initially went out to the streets with slogans of a socialist European Union with strong trade unions, the blue color of the EU flag replaced the red one.

“Today we join grassroots initiatives, because we do not support standing on the barricades and participation in combat actions” – said the activist of LO, Nina Potarskaya, clarifying that no one forbid the members to protest privately in a way they deem appropriate.

“Currently, in general it is difficult to go out [on Maidan] for leftist or feminist organizations. We can participate without naming ourselves. All of our programmatic ideas about self-organization, a progressive tax meet now with a positive response among the masses. But we cannot call them leftist, or otherwise we meet with hostility and they would be no further talk. It comes to us to adapt to the overall situation, because it can be dangerous” – is convinced Potarskaja.

A Marxist organization “Borot’ba”, conversely, is emphatically against the Euromaidan, believing that joining the EU will not bring Ukraine nothing but neo-liberal dogmatism in economics and strengthening the extreme right in politics. *“In case of victory of Euromaidan, it will emerge in the country a more repressive and anti-democratic regime with the participation of pro-fascist forces that today are already demanding inclusion in the special services, catch and torture the people,”* – said the “Borot’by” in its resolution. For its main task the organization considers now to prevent the civil war. But its activists also judged the law of 16 January, calling on *“all the leftist, communist and workers’ organizations in the world to break off all cooperation with the so-called “Communist” Party of Ukraine and its sister organizations.”* (Communist Party deputies supported the enactment of repressive laws).

Although “Borot’ba” boycotted Euromaidan, this did not prevent its individual activists to go on the street – for example, the already mentioned Denis Levin.

“The organization takes the Eurosceptic position, the position taken also by most left-wing organizations in the European Union. In Europe, there is the same process as in Ukraine – the liberalization of the economy. And in addition, in Europe, right-wing forces come to power.” – explains Lewin the “Borot’by” position. But, continues the activist, people go to the streets now not “for eu-rointegration”, but because they are tired of neoliberal reforms, can not see any prospects before themselves, and the economic situation in the country becomes increasingly worse and worse.

“Workers of Dunbas are ready to go out to prevent right-wing attacks on the headquarters of the regional authorities” – says Lewin. *“In western Ukraine there are voices that there is a need to prohibit the symbolism of the Communist Party and the Party of Regions, but in reality, it is a limitation of democracy, regardless of the fact that both parties are actively involved in the development of neo-liberal reforms”* – is convinced the activist and predicts Ukraine *“turning the screws against nationalist asphyxiation.”*

The Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, whose representative Mikhail Wołyniec was once a deputy of the Supreme Council of the Batkivshchyna party of Yulia Tymoshenko, actively supports Euromaidan. Confederation took care of the family of the dead and turned

to Orthodox hierarchs for not admitting to the sacraments functionaries of force departments involved in “punitive operations” against demonstrators. Being a part of the Confederation, the Trade Union of Miners, called the miners of Dunbass to not participate in “free trips”, organized by the administration, to Kiev, where workers could be used in confrontation with opposition demonstrators.

“I am a representative of the Confederation and therefore find myself on the Maidan on the first day – where the members of our union are” – says Volyniec . “We are a democratic union, we do not serve the power and do not obey its orders, we advocate in favor of the change of life and strive for better standards” – explained his position an union leader, adding at the end a little provocative comment – “The Confederation is not involved in politics.”

Kharkiv AST (Autonomous Union of Workers – anarcho-syndicalist union), in its resolution, stresses that is against both eurointegration and against joining the Customs Union and also against the status quo in Ukraine.

“Causes generating social cataclysms are systemic in nature and equally associated with all state formations and their associations” – is convinced AST. As a minimum program the syndicalists advocate the overthrow of the ruling coalition “regionalists” and the Communist Party of Ukraine, the transition to an open arrangement of the budget, the withdrawal of pension law and the introduction of free public transport.

“AST unites in its ranks anarchists and libertarian Marxists and has a federal structure, which is why organizations of Kyiv and of Kharkiv are fully autonomous and can operate in different ways, depending on the political situation,” – explained Ganner, belonging to the Kiev AST.

“We are anarchists, and do not chant “Fame for Ukraine”, Do not make tributes to images of Petlura or Bandera. Nevertheless, we urge you to go to the barricades. Since, as long as the Maidan stands, as long as the Hrushevskoho (barricade) stands, the government is forced to concentrate its forces there, and people have the freedom to work in other places.”

– says a resolution of Black Maidan. The AST support all points of its program, except the one about barricades. The syndicalists think that in flashpoints they cannot do anything.

The parliamentary Communists, KPU, are now absolutely condemned by representatives of all left-wing forces in the country. In the words of activists, KPU is “worse even than the Communist Party of the Russian Federation”. It is a “fake political technology”.

“KPU – it is an endless theater of the absurd, which has no translation into the left, and there is only an effect of nostalgia of retirees” – characterizes the Communists Teologova.

“The party has nothing to do with the movement of the left-wing, acting as clerical and conservative force, openly collaborating with the ruling Party of Regions” – echoed her Ganner.

“Mordor on the dumps”

The wave of protest activity, which rose in Ukraine in November last year, spreads in a heterogeneous environment – the situation varies from region to region, and the local specificity to a large extent determines the role the local leftist groups manage to play on the political scene of their city or district.

“Retirees, screaming yesterday that the governor is a thief, stood up now in his defense. They decided to come to the Maidan and suggest the protesters that, as long as the country is in chaos, they should go to work and not be screwing things up” – says Evgeny Spirin, an anarchist from Luhansk.

The activist points out that in the eastern districts of the country, so far a Soviet stereotype is strong, according to which “Donbass feeds all Ukraine” and the regime skillfully plays on such sentiments.

“The current power looted everything. They sold some for shopping centers, some simply abandoned. Currently, of the power of Donbas, just rusty skeletons of factories remained with written with spray “For Sale” on them” – says Spirin. In the words of the activist, the miners, not looking at it, believe the state propaganda and fear the arrival of “Banderists”.

“Neither the miners nor the workers, nor the poorest strata of the population in Eastern Ukraine did not support the idea of Maidan. Maidan remained here a breath of liberalism for “cultured” team: artists, designers, lawyers, journalists. Our attempts to tell people that we are against the government, against the corruption and for humanity did not yield results. Residents of Luhansk, knocked to his forehead, giggling or just passed by with faces frozen of cold, sentencing “a disgrace, you sold the home to America” – sadly says Spirin.

“In the West [Ukraine], the headquarters of the administration were not conquered by anyone. There deputies resign themselves from attorneys before the people. And here? Nobody even came to mind to try to conquer the administrative headquarters of Luhansk. It would be like hanging a portrait of Roosevelt at the mausoleum of Kim Il Sung”- continues emotionally. In the words of Spirina, the situation in Luhansk extremely tightened on January 27, when Luhansk District Council decided to create people’s squads filled with Cossacks, and deputies spread the rumor that “fighters” from Lviv are going to the district center, and they want to conquer the city.

“After this the city just became hysterical. On social networking sites, furious schoolboys of apartment block estates began to organize meetings, during which they called for “beating the fascist reptile”. All drunkards from sleeping quarters went to the center “to bring the order”. Well, they arrived at the main square, and there are twenty Euromaidanists singing. Do I need to say that no buses with “Lviv fighters” was not and could not have been?” – says Spirin.

“In the Eastern Ukraine, the words “leftists” or “libertarians”, or “anarchists” have become a kind of curses. The anarchist – is a whipster and Russian rock fan. Leftist – is primarily a communist, the worshiper of the USSR, the promoter of the Holodomor (The Big Hunger of 30s) and putting up monuments to Stalin. Well, a libertarian, you know – gay, Banderist and tolerasta¹”- concludes the activist.

“An unusual situation arose in Kharkov – local anarchists turned out to be so serious force on the Maidan that they do not have to adapt to their environment. “They (Kharkiv AST) had an easier situation, because the fascists participated in the local Euromajdanie in a minimal amount” – believes Ganner .

As an activist told, the AST, the Kharkov anarchists are the only left-wing group in Ukraine co-organizing the protests. *“Not being the largest political group, the Kharkiv anarchists organized well small groups agitating inside the Maidan, and a campaign to boycott the products of companies belonging to the ruling party”* – said Igor. In addition, the anarchists from Kharkiv are responsible for protecting the local Euromaidanu. According to the activist, to play a central role in the protests was due to their high level of self-organizing, and *“an authentic focus on the issue of overthrowing the government.”*

¹ Tolerasta is a derogatory term, often used in the East by the environment of the extreme right, a cluster of the words “tolerant” and “pederast”.

“The nationalist revival, independently of the uprising, quickly turn into a total disappointment in the right-wing ideology. And then it will be our time. Besides, it is unlikely that hardened in the battles with the police, the extreme right will smoothly return to the quiet everyday life – their next targets will be leftists and anarchists. A harsh antifascist confrontation awaits us, comparable what was in Russia in the second half of the 2000s.”
– predicts Volodarsky.

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