First of May Anarchist Alliance
What Is an Anarchist Strategy in Ukraine?
Responses to an Ongoing Crisis
December 22, 2014

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# Contents

nationalism has been centralizing, imperialist, colonialist, and authoritarian despite its periodic claims to represent a "Brotherhood of Peoples" and antifascism.

For the most part, the left, Russian and international, has despised, sold out, and repressed Ukrainian national liberation movements. The Communists were responsible for the most horrendous chapter in this history, culminating in forced collectivization during the 1930s, which led to a famine that killed millions of Ukrainians as well as Russians.

The non-communist Ukrainian left, both socialist and anarchist, made serious mistakes and failed when they were in a position either to win self-determination at the head of the Ukrainian people or, given the difficult circumstances, to leave an inspirational example- in-defeat along the lines of the Paris Commune or the Spanish Revolution. Without going into details here, the result of this sad history is that, by default, the leadership of the Ukrainian popular struggle has fallen to the nationalist right. The left has crimes to atone for, while the organized anarchist movement has much to prove in terms of trustworthiness and effectiveness.

**Mike**

sionist Russian state. This and all the above shows that one of the assumptions behind SSARA's analysis has no connection to the actual situation.

In dismissing the idea that Russia constitutes the main danger to the Ukrainians' aspirations, some have argued that it may appear that way now but that the IMF program coming on line will reverse matters. I am not going to speculate here on the longer term effect of Ukraine entering into deeper economic/political ties with the West and the population's eventual reactions. Right now, the threat to Ukrainian independence and the interests of the Ukrainian people comes from another direction. If Russia's seizure of the Crimea, its instigation of and ongoing support to a lethal minoritarian insurgency in the eastern part of the country, and its escalating economic attacks do not constitute a real and immediate danger, I don't know what does.

Additionally, the claim that the main threat to Ukraine comes from West flies in the face of the entire history of the region.

### Ukrainian Nationalism vs. Russian Imperialism

The broad spectrum of the Ukrainians' cultural, political, and economic life and aspirations for a nation state of their own has been repressed, often savagely, over many years, primarily at the hands of the Poles and the Russians. For Ukrainians and neighboring peoples,

Russian nationalism, in both Tsarist and Soviet forms, has been the vehicle for conquest and exploitation. In the past and in the present situation, Ukrainian nationalism has had an overall decentralizing and democratic thrust, whatever its outward forms, limitations, and questionable characteristics. More often than not, the Ukrainian nationalist movements have been significant allies of, or opened space for, the resistance of others peoples, from the Baltic to the Caucasus. In contrast, Russian



## Editors' Note

*We present here excerpts from a series of posts about Ukraine that originally appeared on the discussion site of the First of May Anarchist Alliance (M1), starting in April 2014, as members and supporters of that organization responded to the early stages of Russian intervention. They provide historical background and detail relating to Mike Ermler's article "Defend Ukraine! Fight Russian Imperialism" appearing in Utopian 13, December 2014. The major posts are by Mike, with some contributions by others.*

## April 25 Introduction

It is critical that the First of May Anarchist Alliance (M1) discuss and develop our understanding of the recent events in both Ukraine and Venezuela. The left-wing positions and analyses of these developments that I've seen might best be described as ranging from the disgusting and vile to the pathetically pedantic, confused, and shallow.

Beginning with the disgusting and vile, we have the abjectly pro-Russian filth purveyed by the likes of the Workers World Party and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. In the same vein, Z magazine's April issue ran two "forums," one on Ukraine and the other on Venezuela, without one contribution even mildly defending the uprisings in either of the two countries. As far as Ukraine is concerned, many groups on the broader left are also craven apologists for the Putin and recently-deceased Yanukovitch regimes. The very real historical and present-day grievances of the Ukrainian people are simply discounted and dismissed. In some quarters, there exists an almost pathological belief in the inherently reactionary and racist nature of the Ukrainian people. Other forces, including those who do manage to condemn the Russian aggression, outright deny or downplay the authentic and

autonomous character of the mass movement centered in the Maidan square. This is because (presumably) the movement does not exhibit a perfect "proletarian" and internationalist consciousness.

The anarchist and so-called "libertarian communist" positions I've seen largely fall within the category of the pathetic, confused, and shallow, to put it generously. As sad as this is, I am hopeful that some statements/actions of more substance will come to light.

It is to M1's credit that we did not sign the IWA's "Declaration of Internationalists against the war in Ukraine". It's a piece of rubbish. All the rhetoric of "We will not succumb to nationalist intoxication" and "No Peace Between Classes" simply serves to hide what is a fundamentally abstentionist and anti-revolutionary position. The statement liquidates the entire popular resistance in the Maidan into nothing more than an "increased confrontation between old and new oligarchic clans." It likewise dismisses the popular ousting of Yanukovitch from power in the face of Berkut bullets as the use of "ultra-rightist and ultra-nationalist formations for making a state coup in Kiev." This posturing simply demonstrates the North American Workers Solidarity Alliance's paper revolutionism.

I was under the impression that the Russian KRAS was more real. But real or not, KRAS's"a plague on both your houses" stance is just a back-door capitulation to Great Russian chauvinism. The IWW commission that deals with such matters was considering endorsing the KRAS position in a knee-jerk fashion. One M1 member sought to get them to stop and think, but I have since seen one posted copy of the statement with the IWW listed as a signatory. If the IWW did in fact sign it, this is unfortunate. In similar form, the proposed joint flyer for the anarchist contingent in New York's May Day march, consisting of the WSA, the Black Rose Anarchist Collective, Open City,



party. Various oligarchs now occupy the management chair, but the symbiotic relationship continues. They are mandatory dues check-off closed union shops and bastions of the CPU or the Party of the Regions of former President Yanukovitch. Many affiliates are constantly embroiled in corruption scandals. Over the years, there have been attempts at reform, and in 2004, affiliates with 1.5 million members broke away to form the National Confederation of Trade Union Organizations of Ukraine. This grouping has an exceedingly low profile at least as far as I have been able to discern.

In the east and the South of the country, many ethnic Russians and fully assimilated Ukrainians fear not only the IMF but also any association with the EU. This sentiment is particularly intense in those areas dominated by antiquated heavy industries. These regions boomed during the Soviet era but now constitute an economically-challenged rust belt. Those still employed in these industries fear that competition from Europe will further devastate the area and these populations, and these concerns have been fanned by satraps from the Party of Regions and the CPU, by local mafias, and by Moscow. The aim has been to pit these people against the majority of Ukrainians living in the west and central regions of the country as well as many in their own area.

The much-publicized events in Mariupol are instructive. In the initial days of the separatist revolt, 1,500 employees of local steel oligarch Rinat Ahkmetov's 70,000 workers were participating in anti-Kyiv independence demonstrations. Soon, the activities of the armed rebels wreaked havoc on local communities, while the rebellion and ensuing events threatened the local economy. Management then mobilized numbers of workers to patrol the streets in alliance with the police, pushing the rebels into the shadows. The separatist leaders cried foul, claiming that Ahkmetov had initially helped fund them.

The separatists certainly constitute an anti-West/EU/IMF force, but they are in alliance with and armed by the expan-

the union from its high tide into its decline to present levels. Its influence in VOST is now gone. I have been unable to determine VOST's present stance beyond that it was unequivocally pro-Maidan and is part of an international federation centered around some Christian Democratic (Catholic) unions. The federation's chair is currently held by its Dutch affiliate. Various Christian Democratic and Christian Republican parties/formations have been and remain part of the center-right of the broader nationalist movement. Militants from these currents may now have the most influence within the union. VOST bills itself as being for a cooperative market economy based on eco-social Christian values. Recently a Swedish trade union publication described it as "libertarian". My guess is that it is like KVPU, pro-EU and anti-IMF but with its anti-IMF stance on possibly firmer (religious) footing than KVPU's. Unsurprisingly, it is largely based in the western regions of Ukraine with its higher density of so-called "Uniate" Eastern-rite Greek Catholics and lighter industry as opposed to the eastern region's different demographics and concentrated heavy industry and mining.

This brings us to the by-far largest section of labor organizations. These are direct descendants of the old Soviet-era government unions. In 1990, the bureaucratic Communist leadership of the Ukrainian Soviet" Republic" presided over the establishment of independence for Ukraine. There was serious pressure from below for this step by an insurgent and broad- based nationalist movement. When actually achieved, independence was mostly the result of the implosion of the USSR's union state structures, with a section of the CPU and allied aspiring elites at the helm. In short, it was not a deeply nationalist or social-revolutionary event. The 8.7 million- member Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) is a real reflection of this fact. Its constituent parts can essentially be characterized as company unions, their entire culture forged in Soviet times, with management and union being arms of the Communist state/



and others, mentions Ukraine only once, referring merely to the "rise of fascism" in that country.

In a much different light, there are the statements/reports issued by the Autonomous Workers Union of Ukraine. This (I gather, small) anarcho-syndicalist organization attempted to develop activity in the Maidan and, to their credit, did not sign the IWA statement.The group indicated that they recognized the Maidan movement's significance and realized that its defeat at the hands of the Yanukovitch regime would be a setback for the Ukrainian people. For whatever reason, however, they did not seem to be able to figure out how to deal with the presence of extreme right-wing forces in the movement, nor were they able to elaborate a clear analysis or the outlines of a strategy.

Many anarchist outlets have done no more than circulate the AWU pieces as their cover-age/analysis of the struggle in Ukraine. Two examples are the Anarkismo website and Tahrir-ICN. Crimethinc issued a piece that at least warrants reading. I won't try to classify it. Let's just say that it poses questions different from those being dealt with here.

In the past few weeks, I have been trying to develop a more detailed understanding of both the character of the Maidan movement and the rightist forces within it. It will take me a little more time to get what I've learned into writing, but recent events make it urgent to get out my basic thoughts and developing position as a contribution to M1 elaborating its take on things. Below are some rough notes.

## Notes toward a position

Thursday's Geneva agreement, worked out by representatives from Russia, the United States, the Ukrainian provisional government, and the European Union, reveals that all the momentum is with Putin. His seizure of the Crimea is no

longer the central issue. It is now superseded by Russia's dagger thrusts into Ukrainian territory under the false claims of the existence of a major threat to the Russian-speaking populations there. Clearly, Russia has managed to cow a weak, unconsolidated, and temporary government in Kiev, a government also fearful of, and under siege by, an amalgam of domestic democratic and militant nationalist insurgent forces. The agreement to disarm all independent armed groups is much more about disarming and disbanding the Pravy (Right) Sektor and an array of Ukrainian autonomous self-defense groups than about eliminating pro-Russia militias. Defanging Pravy Sektor is a goal shared by the Kiev government, US Secretary of State Kerry, and the EU, despite their face-off with Putin and their desire that the Russian militias disappear as well. Probably most important, we need to be clear that Putin's actions are not solely aimed at seizing an opportunity to gather in areas in which ethnic Russians predominate and which were formerly under Tsarist/Soviet domination. It is also an attempt to blunt and obscure the example of a successful insurrection against a fellow authoritarian regime at his doorstep.

As anarchists, with our principles of decentralization, respect for minority and language rights, and opposition to states and national borders, we need to be especially on guard in this situation. We cannot allow our analysis and stance to be sidetracked by abstractions or by second guessing ourselves with talk about "self-determination," etc., in the eastern regions. Yes, some numbers of ethnic Russian residents of Ukraine are involved in the separatist struggle, and some portion of the population of eastern Ukraine has always wanted to be part of a greater Russia. But for over two decades, a significant majority of the Russian-speaking east, including people of full Russian descent, have supported the continuation of a unified and independent Ukrainian state, and this remains true today. The separatist struggle in



chist movement in Ukraine seemed to have wider influence and greater possibilities in the 1990s. What happened? Why isn't it better situated today? Is everything to be blamed on the rampant nationalism of the populace without a shred of understanding of why this is the case? Are we as a movement going to grapple with our own shortfalls? For one, are we ever going to come to grips with the national dimension of the struggle?

Are there any possibilities for the emergence of a working class alternative that is independent of both the West and Russia, any developments that could in the near-term be both a focus and boost for a radical anti-authoritarian current? With my limited knowledge and distance from the scene, all I can say is nothing has grabbed my attention.

The pro-Maidan Confederation of Free Trade Unions (KVPU) claims to be opposed to IMF austerity plans, but it is also pro-EU, allied with and receiving aid from the US AFL/CIO, while their chief figure is close to Orange oligarch Iulia

Timoshenko — not exactly a sure bet to go to the wall against the IMF, let alone constitute a hard anti-US/EU independent working-class pole. Their members number 268,000 (42% of whom are reported to be young people). It also seems to be the main focus for the nonCommunist Party of Ukraine left. What that means I can't say. The independent miners' union NGPU is affiliated to KVPU.

Numbering 150,000 is the oldest independent union organization VOST/Volya. VOST is the acronym for All Ukrainian Workers Solidarity. Volya is the word for "freedom," in the sense of "will," as distinguished from freedom, in the sense of liberty, which is "Svoboda." VOST was initiated by the rising nationalist movement in the final days of the Soviet Union and was modeled on Poland's Solidarnosc. Initially larger, it has remained at its present level for some time. The Ukrainian National Assembly-Ukrainian National Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO), a militant nationalist formation, was influential in

ans prime is that they are doing too little to defend Ukraine. Moreover, some numbers of people, and not only amongst the elites, are even willing to consider an IMF austerity plan. Looking at Poland 20 years ago and now, they believe that that would be far better than being economically hitched to Russia or the status quo. National liberals, national conservatives, and even the once anti-EU Svoboda, are now looking to the West. The only substantial forces sharply hostile to the IMF and the EU seem to be those grouped in and around the Right Sector.

The pro-Maidan revolutionary left appears to be highly limited in both influence and in their ability to deal with the unfolding events. In fact, the left that is hostile to the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU has fractured as the national and Russian questions have reasserted themselves. Political groups like the anarcho-syndicalist AWU have functioned within, and to some degree have been sustained by, united fronts within this milieu. The evolution of the Borotbists and the circles around the left-Menshevik Boris Kagarlitsky toward becoming left agents of Putinism has diminished the influence of this section of the left and the joint projects they were part of. Hopefully, our anarchist friends can consolidate their forces and move forward among the pro-Maidan left-wing elements, but at this point, we have to be honest about their shortcomings. Their influence seems to be centered in the university student union, Direct Action. Of this group, I am aware of some positives but little else. How wide and deep is its influence amongst students? Does its influence extend beyond campuses in Kyiv and Kharkiv? To secondary students? They have already admitted to an inability to have a presence on the barricades during the Maidan events. It is also my understanding that on a Skype hookup, they have indicated an inability to function in the East. I am not looking down on them or on what they've been able to accomplish, just trying to get us to see things in a more grounded fashion. Why in the land of Makhno is anarchism so weak? The anar-



eastern Ukraine is overwhelmingly a creature of Putin and the Russian state,part of their efforts to (re)extend the Russian empire, to reclaim territory lost with the col-lapse of the Soviet Union. This is demonstrated by the central role Russian Nazi formations,assorted other fascists and Monarchists, as well as National-Communist and old-line Communist groups are playing in the movement. Most saliently, overall direction and crucial military capacity are being provided by organs of Russian intelligence and by special-forces units specifically created for, and forged in, service in the "near abroad," Chechnya and Georgia, to name just two. Throughout Ukraine and particularly in the east, pro-Maidan activists report the ever-present threat of beatings or assassination at the hands of these groups. Three such killings have taken place in the last few days. Two of the victims were lower-level officials of the main Ukrainian provisional government party. The third was a pro-Svoboda journalist who had done a series of exposes of his community's pro-Russian political boss/oligarch. Yes, right-wing forces within the Ukrainian popular movement represent a problem to be wrestled with. Likewise, the government in Kiev offers no salvation for the Ukrainian people, either of the social question or of resolute action in defense of Ukrainian independence. But the critical issue of the moment is not Ukrainian nationalism, let alone the threat of a "Greater Ukraine," it is the vision of "Greater Russia"shared by the Putin-led state, his popular base, and an array of virulent Russian nationalist force, a vision and coalition bent on destroying what the popular movement in the Maidan represents and portends.

It is crucial to note that as part of the Geneva agreement, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk immediately attempted to move new legislation in the Ukrainian parliament in Kiev. This legislation mandates greater levels of regional and local autonomy, including in the east, involving control over budgets, language rights, and the election of previously centrally-

appointed officials. It is being blocked by a united front of the parliamentary fractions of the Communist Party and the Party of the Regions (Yanukovitch's organization). Meanwhile, the armed Russian-separatist units occupying Ukrainian territory are saying that they will not disband until the Kiev government resigns, the Pravy Sektor is disarmed and disbanded and its leadership jailed, and the ongoing Maidan occupation is dispersed. My attitude is that these 'separatists' can all leave for Russia in body bags, if need be.

The heart of the matter is what was/is the political content of the Euro Maidan. Various political forces assert that it was essentially a movement planned and called into being by a collaborative effort of pro-Western Ukrainian oligarchs and parties, the EU, and the US/NATO, in short, an imperialist offensive designed to isolate Russia and weaken it militarily and economically. According to this narrative, the bulk of the Maidan demonstrators are essentially pawns of the West with a limited-to-backward political outlook. Presumably,they had been called out by a bloc of pro-West parties, setting the stage and providing cover for a coup that drove the democratically-elected government, more reflective of the interests of Russia and the political bosses and oligarchs of eastern Ukraine, from power.The street muscle of the conspiracy was supposedly furnished by Ukrainian Nazis and nationalists. The precise wordings of what are basically the same analysis depend on whereon the political scale those promoting this position fall, from Lyndon La Rouche, on the right, through WWP/FRSO, to IWA anarchist, on the left.

My own analysis is that the Maidan movement represents a genuine popular struggle to defend Ukraine from Russian domination and encroachment. The context is as follows.For a couple of years now, and within the context of an ailing Ukrainian economy, negotiations had been underway for an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU.In November of last year, an assembly of students came together



the Stalinist FRSO-Fightback or took up with the Maoid-social-democratic FRSO-Refoundation.

More recently, CSAC, as an association of anarchist groupings with an interest in the working class and the labor movement, proved itself so averse to real discussion and clarification differences that over several years it could not come up with either an ongoing collaboration in the unions or a remotely serious analysis of labor's present condition.

It is critical that we in M1 hold ourselves to rigorous standards of discussion and debate. In addition to being a network of organizers and activists, and in order to be more effective as such, M1 must develop itself as an organization of political ideas and combat, strategic, programmatic, and theoretical. Given our rejection of political command structures, to be effective, anarchist initiatives require a highly politicize constituency. We cannot achieve this by tip-toeing around or shying away from questions that may cause friction. A firm and long-term unity needed to navigate and withstand future developments depends on this.

## The United States, Russia, and Ukraine

The SSARA piece stated that many Ukrainians, in the United States and in Ukraine, recognize the totalitarian nature of both the US and Russia. Incorrect use of the term "totalitarian" aside, this means that ARA believes there is a widespread rejection of both imperialist camps among the Ukrainian populace. This is far-fetched, to say the least. There is absolutely no doubt that Ukrainians, both in Ukraine and in the diaspora, have serious illusions in the US and the West as a whole, with the exception of those who yearn for a return to the "good old days" under the Tsars and the commissars. Several generations of freedom-minded Ukrainians generally looked to the Cold Warriors in the West for support. At the moment, the prime criticism of the US and Europe on the part of most pro-independence Ukraini-

significant differences with the rest of the far left, both Maoist and Trotskyist. As we attempted to carry out this political vision and responded to political developments, this unity rapidly proved to the be purely formal. Substantially different orientations and attitudes obviously lurking just below the surface. Even so, this ultimately false unity was at a higher level than what I've experienced in the anarchist movement over the past 26 years.

During the nine years of its existence, the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation proved congenitally unable to sharpen and deepen its proclaimed anarchism. In its dying days, outside of a handful of individuals, the anarchist majority, enamored with and schooled solely in action, could not muster even a pathetic defense of anarchism. Many of these individuals, hostile to serious and pointed discussions of theory and strategy, have now disappeared from serious political life. In hindsight, it is obvious that the political current L&R gave expression to in 1989 was largely one of direct-action radicalism. Its affinity for the anarchist label was born in @narchoPunk-influ- enced youth sub-cultures and in rejection of the tactical conservatism of the Socialist Workers Party in the Central American and South Africa solidarity movements and of the authoritarian, homophobic politics of the Revolutionary Communist Party in and around NBAU and the like. It never became an anarchism fully weighed and struggled-for, and as a result, in the end as in the beginning, it remained little more than a meaningless label. Additionally, the milieu was far too influenced by Prairie Fire and STO's "white skin privilege" politics. Little surprise that it spawned forces whose vision/practice proved to be either snottily contemptuous of or in outright opposition to anarchism. There was Bring The Ruckus, a Jamesian/Marxist-influenced group with strong liberal overtones. Others groupings tried to square anarchism with state-capitalist elements and, after giving up any pretense of anarchism, joined



in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) to support the idea of Ukraine being part of Europe. To their minds, this would open up freedom of movement within the broader European economy for Ukrainian university graduates facing bleak employment prospects in their own country. The students were also attracted to EU standards of justice and political liberties, including greater freedoms for LGBT people. A few days later,the pro-Russian Yanukovitch regime announced a change of course: a new trade dealwith Russia. In response, a well-known Ukrainian journalist of Afghan birth put out a call on FaceBook for more determined action to oppose Yanukovitch's pro-Russian maneuver, and, in this way, Euro Maidan, a self-organized zone reminiscent of Occupy Wall St. and Tahrir Square, was born. The movement was a direct descendant of, and in the identical geographical location as, the Orange Revolution of nine years before and a student encampment/hunger strike, in what was then called Lenin Square, in 1990, part of the struggle that led to Ukrainian independence.

On the evening of November 29, the Maidan encampment was violently attacked by the Berkut riot police. The assault prompted massive protests to defend the students and reclaim the square. The counter-attack was spearheaded by networks of Afghan war veterans, who had remained organized since the Soviet Union left Afghanistan and had rallied to defend Gorbachev against the hardline pro-Soviet coup attempt years before. Joining the vets were people from a wide variety of backgrounds — political, economic, social, generational, ethnic, and religious.

It was only then that the leaders of the parliamentary fractions of the Ukrainian opposition parties joined the movement in an attempt to place themselves at its head. These figures,some of whom are members of the current provisional government — Yatsenyuk (for the then still jailed Batkivschyna [Fatherland] Party leader, Yulia Tymoshenko), the boxer Kl-

itschko (for UDAR) and Tyanhybok (for the far-right Svoboda Party) — claimed what turned out to be an uneasy and shaky "leadership" position, as they were periodically surrounded and denounced as the days passed. A Council of National Resistance was created and began meeting in the Trade Union Building on the edge of the square. The Euro Maidan was in fact open to many influences, not least of which was the daily scrutiny and growing anger of those fighting to hold the square. A planned and orchestrated conspiracy it definitely was not.

During December and into January, the Maidan occupiers raised new demands, including the call that the government resign. In addition, various kinds of activists and organizations more fully set up shop in the square. Young people traveled from Poland, Belarus,Russia, and the Ukrainian diaspora to join the struggle. Money also flowed in, and artists big and small regularly performed. The idea of a "Revolution of Dignity" arose. One observer, paraphrasing the words of another person and now paraphrased by me, wrote:the Maidan mixes anarchic communism in organization with a nationalistic emotional content, while it is liberal in argumentation and symbols. Both also commented on the religious atmosphere and on the presence of Crimean Tatars, Jews, and Russians.

As this second phase developed, there was an increase in brutal attacks away from the Maidan on journalists critical of the government. Activists also began to disappear; their bodies are still being found. Then on January 16, the government, with a majority constituted by the Party of the Regions and the Communist party, issued curbs on protest and freedom of speech. On January 22, amidst a rising curve of militancy and sharp clashes, the first death in open demonstrations occurred, soon to be followed by many more.

By this time, the Maidan had become a zone of barricade, watchtowers, and intense battles,as the protesters defended themselves from armed assault. The occupiers organized



believers reaching into varied widespread strata of the population — in short, a society like the former Soviet Union at its zenith.

Russia at present is no longer totalitarian but retains significant holdovers from, and reservoirs of nostalgia for, that past. The US is far from being totalitarian, despite aspects of our society that can be defined as criminal or policies that might be described as having a totalitarian streak.

I use the term "totalitarian" in an Orwellian sense and believe M1 should do likewise. Revolutionaries need to be rigorous in analyzing events and in determining what to say about and how to intervene in them. I feel that your usage of the term totalitarian will end up rendering the term meaningless as well as trivializing the abomination that was the Soviet Union, its satellites, and similar regimes.

Taking firm positions and drawing hard lines within the anarchist movement and even within M1 is as necessary as engaging in political struggle with those with whom we have more significant differences with or to whom we are in outright opposition. We must constantly be preparing ourselves for struggles more intense and multi-faceted than anything we have experienced to date. Facing the difficult questions raised by the turmoil in Ukraine is but one part of sharpening our tactical and strategic skills. We must be prepared to respond to future events, both international and domestic, of equal complexity. Reality does not follow a neat, clear-cut script of good guys vs. bad guys. A string of leftist and anarchist platitudes does not constitute a revolutionary strategy. Apparent agreement in program, principle, and commitment is not always what it seems; it must constantly be tested.

For example, between 1969 and 1973, some of us were members of the International Socialists. Officially, the 300–400 member organization was committed to a "pro-working class, revolutionary democratic socialism from below." There were a number of additional points of agreement as well as

As a very minor point. Xtn says Putin is not a "racialist" but favors Great Russian hegemony. But Great Russian chauvinism is the form racialism takes in Russia. While until recent decades, Russians had little experience with groups like Africans (but treats them like dirt), Great Russians (the ethnic Russians proper) looked at both other Slavs and Asian peoples in the empire as lesser human beings. That included Ukrainians, and of course, Putin's course of action reflects the idea that Russia is "naturally" entitled to be top dog in Ukraine.

Best to all,

**Chris**

## Mike Response To Dee — June 3

I live in Detroit but have always paid particular attention to events in Central and Eastern Europe, given I have relatives in what are now Romania and Serbia.

Re totalitarianism, you seem to miss the import of one part of the definition you quote… "to control all aspects of public and private life." On one hand, this entails such things as restricting the ability to travel (internally and externally) and to quit or change jobs through the use of internal passports, labor books, etc. On the other hand, totalitarian states exert a constant full court press in the realm of speech, thought, and even the autonomy of the inner self. This is behind its intrusion into religious matters. Totalitarian governments actively intervene in and set the bounds for literature, music and the arts. They also control the sciences, theoretically and practically. All this to enforce an ideological condition of unfreedom. It is an attempt to foster a coercion from within. External coercion is ever present in a huge, highly centralized security/police apparatus on which there are virtually no checks or limitations. This apparatus is connected to a vast network of backbiters, snitches, and true



self-defense groups and medical and logistics services to sustain what had become a huge military effort. The protesters, refusing to disperse, seized weapons and returned fire. Shortly afterwards President Yanukovitch and many ministers fled.

In this increasingly combative phase, the visibility and reputation of the right-wing nationalist forces rose within the Maidan. Given their militaristic bent, this is not surprising.

Prior to this, the highest profile of the far right was in the parliamentary opposition, in the form of Svoboda (with 40 some seats). Oleh Tyanhybok, Svoboda's main spokesperson, was a key leader in the parliamentary opposition bloc attempting to establish control over the Maidan and negotiate with the Yanukovitch government. Their negotiating demands increasingly fell short of those emanating from below, particularly the insistence that the government resign. All of the attacks coming from right-wing forces that I know anything specific about involved Svoboda. It was at this time that Spilna Sprava (Common Cause), a direct-action group made up largely of young people akin to Serbia's Otpor (Resistance) and Egypt's April 6$^{th}$ Movement, seized two government ministries, but they were evicted by a mass attack of Svobodas's youth/street forces, as part of an effort enforce the parliamentary opposition's negotiating strategy. It was only after the uprising went into full swing and the negotiations collapsed that Svoboda's street forces seriously went to the barricades. A little over a week ago, a group from Svoboda, including many young women,attacked an LGBT event in Kiev. My impression is that Svoboda was the likely source of much of the pressure put on leftists in the Maidan. Today, Svoboda is still heavily involved as a junior partner to Batskivschyna in the provisional government.

The Pravy Sektor (Right Sector) has consistently taken a more revolutionary stance.They've harassed the negotiators, including Svoboda, and raised the call for a revolution.Their preparedness, willingness to act, and courage won them much

admiration, even from their opponents. As a result, they have attracted many young people, and their example has inspired others to imitate aspects of their militant self-organization.

Pravy is actually a united front of several groups. The Tryzub (Trident) organization is its initiator and driving force. Tryzub considers the enemies of Ukrainian independence to be "imperialism and chauvinism, fascism and communism, cosmopolitanism and pseudo-nationalism, totalitarianism, and anarchy, any evil that seeks to parasitize on the sweat and blood of Ukrainians." It rejects Svoboda's parliamentary strategy and keeps a laser-like focus on the Russian threat and on the demand for full national independence. Many of its older cadres and those of some of its partners in the bloc have fought against the Russians in Chechnya and Georgia. It views some of the influences brought into the nationalist movement from Fascism and National Socialism as foreign imports and diversions. Thus, the Belyi Molot (White Hammer) organization, an early part of the Pravy, has been expelled for its unruly behavior and its failure to follow discipline. It is probably safe to say its racialism and hooliganism towards "enemies"could not be curbed. Tryzub has long-standing relations with the Tatar community and considers anyone who fights and dies for Ukraine an ally. Significantly, it is proud ofthe Odessa-born Jew, Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism, as a product of Ukraine. It is certainly an authoritarian and far-right organization, with very traditionalist values.

On April 1, the provisional government discussed attempting to suppress Pravy but took no action. Tension between the government and Pravy mounted, resulting in clashes and the death of one key Pravy ally at the hands of state security. In the wake of Yanukovitch's flight, Pravy began spreading calls to prepare for guerrilla and cyber warfare, in anticipation of Russian aggression. In the hours prior to Yanukovitch's departure, police and military installations were over run or opened up. Thousands of weapons are now out in the populace. Pravy



align with the West. The two can't be rolled into one, although there is overlap. Putin wants to stamp it all out.

As a result, I am much more convinced of the need to oppose Russian interests as much as those of the West and to stress a politic that recognizes and — in both word and deed — supports the democratic forces from below that are waging the struggle in Ukraine.

The situation is complicated in large part because of the role right-wing, anti-democratic forces, some more extreme than others, are playing in the popular struggle. I have not been able to wrap my head around this yet. I'm starting to, but it's been slow going.

All this said, I am in general agreement with Mike and Chris's position. I'm going to think more about it all and get back soon.

In struggle,

**Xtn**

## Ch Comment, May 3

I think it's crucial for us to understand that we can take a position that puts us in a "tactical bloc" with other groups, without supporting their politics. We support (I hope) Ukraine's

independence and integrity for our reasons, not nationalist reasons but democratic ones. We're free to attack the leadership politically, and we do that. Our aim is to change the political mix and to offer democratic leadership to people on the ground who, themselves, are following the rightist leaders not for rightist reasons but for democratic ones, because they (the people on the ground) want a democratic and independent Ukraine.

ternal dialogue on Ukraine, Russia, and the geo-political meaning of the current situation. I do feel that the matter is substantive, although if we are not engaged in or thinking about international matters, it might appear to be abstract.

My own thinking on the Ukraine has shifted over the last several months. In the beginning, with little knowledge of Eastern Europe and Russia, I saw little to support in either side. I was eager to learn more but was rather awestruck by the fact that the Far Right and National Socialists seemed to be key players if not the dominant groups in the resistance to the corrupt Yanukovitch regime and its Russian backers. It's undeniable that Rightists are involved and playing central roles in that resistance, but my understanding of these groups, the differences between them (Pravy Sektor vs. Svoboda vs. other Nationalists), the broad scope of the resistance movement (Right, Left, anarchist, student, worker) and the interactions of these tendencies within the resistance movement has led me to reconsider my initial position.

What I also have been investigating are the Putin/Russian interests and the growth and renewal of ruling class power blocs. Putin and his clique are looking to position themselves against the last 20 years of post-Soviet US/Western hegemony. Currently, my position is that there are many issues of overlapping interest and conflict among the various global ruling classes. In other words, there are distinct blocs within global capital, and these blocs have their distinct interests and politics, as well as differing underlying ideological frameworks.

For example, Putin's ideology is at odds with what is seen as Western liberalism. Putin is a rabid authoritarian, anti-gay, anti-feminist, and while he is not a racialist, he does postulate the idea of Great Russia over what appears to be a developing Eurasian ethnic hierarchy. Ukraine represents several issues for him. One is the popular revolt against the Russian sphere of interest. Another is the long existing desire in Ukraine to



began demanding that the government create a Revolutionary National Guard. Given this pressure and the Russian threat, the government issued a call for volunteers. In the Kiev area, at least 200 members of Pravy self-defense units answered the call and entered the now mobilized National Guard.

Anarchist revolutionaries needed to be in the Maidan, involved in the whole range of activities occurring there and attempting to give them an anti-authoritarian thrust. From the limited reports I've seen, it appears that the people we are in contact with were prevented from establishing a presence on the barricades/front lines because of the pressure from right-wing groups. Although it is easy to comment from afar, I can't believe that this arena had to be ceded to the rightists. The front line was manned by an array of self-defense groups (including a Jewish one) formed by a variety of groups, not all of which were rightists. At one point, there were as many as 23, and this number has probably increased. If anarchists were not able to come out openly, under their own names and banners, they ought to have considered being part of another formation that gave them room to function. Was no one able to organize a workplace- or union-based self-defense unit?

During the uprising, anarchists would have been seen as splitters if they had explicitly attacked the presence of the rightists, since they were making real contributions to the struggle. In effect,then, anarchists would have been in a tactical bloc with the right-wing nationalists, and we must recognize this. But as part of building tactical unity, anarchists ought to have denounced all attacks by right-wing elements on other participants in the movement as undermining the struggle, and if physically able, to muster forces to actively confront those rightists who do so.

Pravy should not be the only force (at least that I am aware of) calling for the arming of the people by the provisional government. Anarchists should also have raised the call, while

adding the demand for the formation of armed workplace units under the control of the unions or popular committees.

Anarchist groupings should be setting up clandestine printing facilities and other Capabilities while agitating in the broader anti-authoritarian milieu for other groups to do so, jointly where possible. They also need to be involved in as many popular struggles as possible. For example, at present, every day in Kiev, protesters have organized demonstrations outside major Russian banks demanding the government seize them. Anarchists need to be in those protests and, in general calling for the expropriation of all industries and businesses tied to or supporting the Russian state or the pro-Russian separatists and placing them under the control of workers and staff loyal to Ukraine. As a general policy, anarchists should be raising demands for some kind of worker/community control over all industries and businesses vital to national defense and well-being.

The key idea is to try to establish a tactical/military bloc with all forces, including supporters of the provisional government, who are fighting to defend the national liberation of Ukraine from Russian aggression, while simultaneously laying the basis, through agitation and organization, for building a movement to overthrow what is in fact a reactionary government of capitalists and oligarchs and carry out a deeper, social revolution. Even if such a strategy is not realized, any political tendency that effectively campaigns for any it will earn respect among the best militants in the Ukrainian national struggle and make a contribution to the strategic arsenal of tomorrow.

**Mike**

P.S. I am working on a fuller analysis of today's Ukrainian right, along with some historical background on Ukraine in general, and more narrowly, on Ukrainian nationalist movements of the past.



## Comment on Mike's Post, April 26

Thanks to Mike for a major effort of thought, information, and formulation. Mike knows far more than I about the different groups involved in the Ukraine struggle, their history and their actions during the last months. I agree with the overall approach he outlines.

I don't think this is a difference, but I would put some stress on defending the national independence of Ukraine. This puts us in the bloc Mike describes and differentiates us from the IWA position and similar views. It should be clear that defending national independence does not mean supporting consolidation of the new Ukrainian government or any sort of repression against ethnic non-Ukrainians. Practically, Ukraine's independence is very much under threat now, in the current period of a few weeks. I don't think Putin aims to annex the whole of Ukraine, but to annex or establish a "protectorate" over eastern Ukraine seems well within his capability and purposes. The results for political independents, LGBT, Roma, and lifestyle "offenders" such as drug users would be very bad, as they already are in Crimea.

The West has its own intention to lock Ukraine into its orbit, but at the moment the major threat to Ukraine's independence comes from Russia.

Again, thanks to Mike for the document which I think takes us forward in understanding this situation.

**Chris, NYC**

## Post by Xtn, Detroit, May 3

Friends,

I'm happy that the conversation is happening. I would like to offer some clarifications and comments. Beyond the endorsement of any statement, my primary concern is to deepen an in-