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Reason in revolt

Ukraine: the truth about Maidan

“Not left-wing in terms of its composition but left-wing, libertarian in spirit...”

By Dale Street



The truth about the Maidan

Just over a year ago — in the early hours of 30 November — the first major street clashes occurred in the Maidan protests in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. Three months later, the protests brought down the country's president, Viktor Yanukovych.

Yanukovych, Russian political leaders, the Putin-loyal media in Russia, Stalin-nostalgics, and sham anti-imperialists vehemently denounced the Maidan protests and the post-Maidan government (or "junta", as they called it).

They claimed that the protests and the new government were dominated by fascists and neo-Nazis, part of a vast conspiracy engineered by the US, the EU and NATO to bring down a legitimate government and replace it by one subservient to the interests of western capitalism.

Speaking after having fled Ukraine, Yanukovych declared: "A band of ultra-nationalists and neo-fascists is at work in Ukraine, trying to take over the presidential powers. They want to place the army under the banner of Bandera and unleash a civil war. I want to say to the patrons of these black forces in the west: You have forgotten what fascism is."

Russia's President Putin spoke in the same terms: "Those mainly responsible for the overthrow (of Yanukovych) were nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-semites. They exercise a decisive role in many things and still determine what happens in Ukraine today."

A statement issued by the Russian GONGO (government-organised non-governmental organisation) "World Without Nazism" warned of "the radical nationalism of the extremists of the Right Sector, who have come to power with the moderate nationalists of the parties Udar and Fatherland."

Alexander Brod, a member of the Russian "Presidential Human Rights Council" went even further in his assessment: "A state coup has occurred in Ukraine, carried out by the forces of the opposition, radicals, neo-Nazis and criminals. In Ukraine the threat of genocide of the Russians hangs in the air."

In the Russian mass media the focus on Ukraine's far-right Right Sector was so intense that by early 2014 the Right Sector was being mentioned in the media nearly as often as the Russian ruling party (United Russia): in a single month Right Sector was mentioned 18,900 times, while United Russia was mentioned 19,050 times.

These condemnations of the Maidan and the post-Maidan government were not confined to Russia. According to the American magazine *Counterpunch*:

"Ukraine is burning, it is going to the dogs. It has been taken over by an illegitimate government engorged with fascists, neo-Nazis and simple pro-Western opportunists, as well as countless EU- and US-sponsored members of various NGOs."

Here in Britain the theme of a US-EU-NATO-neo-Nazi-fascist conspiracy found a ready supply of spokespersons and champions, most of whom chose to pool their efforts in the so-called "Solidarity with the Anti-Fascist Resistance in Ukraine" (SARU) campaign.

According to the Workers Power group: "(The Maidan protests) were led by fascist formations like Svoboda and the Right Sector, who were rewarded for their key role with government posts far out of proportion to their electoral support."

According to Socialist Appeal: "The Euromaidan movement was, in the final analysis, a reactionary movement, from the point of view of its class composition, political aims and dominant political forces and leadership... Far right and neo-Nazi forces provided the shock troops."

And according to a motion passed at this year's annual conference of the RMT trade union: "The neo-Nazi paramilitary Right Sector organisation and fascist Svoboda party acted as the vanguard of the anti-Yanukovych protests... The coup government is an alliance of privatising free-market conservative parties and their fascist allies."

The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) has not joined SARU, but, interviewed by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti in May, SSP co-convenor Colin Fox said: "I think the so-called West has been backing neo-Nazis in Ukraine for some time and then they toppled the democratically elected president of Ukraine."

This was no "off-message" comment by Fox. According to the SSP's magazine: "The coup was dominated by the fascist Right Sector, which joined the government: BNP-, Golden-Dawn-style fascists in a government in a European capital. The fascists who turned so much of Russia into rubble are now in government and on Russia's borders."

In November Fox gave RIA Novosti another interview. "The West — the EU, UK and USA — have been out to destabilise Ukraine for many years," he said, going on to explain

that "the lack of recognition for the democratic elections of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions mirrored the Spanish government's contempt for elections in Catalonia."

The October 2014 parliamentary elections in Ukraine have been portrayed in similar terms. According to the first deputy-speaker of the Russian Duma (parliament):

"Neo-Nazi-minded and Russophobic politicians marched in different columns under different names. The voting percentages achieved by each of these is unimportant. What counts is the total and the outcome: The Rada (parliament) is an aggressive ultra-right-wing monopoly, the Orange Rada has been replaced by the Brown one."

The day after the elections, when most votes had still not been counted, *Pravda* (English edition) carried an article summed up by its headline "Ukrainian Elections: Orange Changes to Brown."

Counterpunch explained: "A motley collection of ultra-nationalists will make up the new Rada. Most of the new MPs are rabidly right-wing and ultra-hostile to Russia... an assortment of Holocaust deniers and sympathisers for the Ukrainian Nazis who fought with the SS during World War Two."

The far right has been a visible force in Ukraine ever since the collapse of Stalinist one-party rule and Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991.

The lie in the "Maidan=EU-fascist coup" line is not that it invents a far right which never existed. The lie is in the claims that the Maidan boosted and was led by the far right, that the overthrow of Yanukovych was a far-right conspiracy, and that the pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk represent anti-fascist resistance.

The Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (CUN) was founded in 1992. It declared for a restoration of Ukrainian national values, a resurrection of the spiritual life of the nation, and the total eradication of all consequences of Russian rule, including "visual vestiges" (i.e. Lenin monuments). Its slogan was "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to her Heroes!"

Trizub ("Trident") was created by the CUN as its paramilitary wing in 1993 but subsequently broke away to become an organisation in its own right. Reflecting its origins in the CUN, Trizub stood for the creation of a strong Ukrainian state.

FAR RIGHT

Led by Dmitry Yarosh since 2005, it declared its enemies to be "imperialism and chauvinism, fascism and communism, cosmopolitanism and pseudo-nationalism, totalitarianism and anarchy, any evil that seeks to prey parasitically on the sweat and blood of Ukrainians."

The essentially national-conservative ideology of Trizub went hand-in-hand with physical attacks on its declared enemies (members of the Ukrainian Communist Party) and victims of its prejudices (above all: gays). Trizub was also active in blowing up Soviet-era monuments.

The origins of the Ukrainian National Assembly—Ukrainian National Self Defence (UNA) date back to 1990. Twice banned by the Ukrainian authorities, the UNA has a record of combining nationalist anti-Russian agitation with street violence, including repeated clashes with the police.

Apart from its campaigns for the retention of nuclear weapons by Ukraine (for "defence" against Russia) and its defence of the Ukrainian Church (under "attack" from its Russian counterpart), UNA has also dispatched volunteers to fight in some of the wars which have flared up on the territories of the former USSR.

The Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU) was founded in 1991. It combined Ukrainian ultra-nationalism with neo-Nazism. Membership was restricted to ethnic Ukrainians and all other parties were declared to be "either collaborators and enemies of the Ukrainian revolution or romanticists."

Its politics were openly racist and white-supremacist. Both its name ("Social-National") and its symbols (the "wolfsangel") were deliberately designed to evoke Hitler's Nazis. The SNPU also had its own military wing, Patriot of Ukraine, created in 1999 under the leadership of Andrei Parubiy. In 2004 the SNPU changed its name to Svoboda ("Freedom" — see below).

Although Svoboda shut down Patriot of Ukraine in 2004 as part of its rebranding as a more mainstream party, it did not entirely break its links with paramilitary organisations.

The C14 organisation functioned as a semi-detached youth-cum-paramilitary wing of Svoboda, with a record of attacks on left-wing activists in Kiev. Its politics were summed up by the "14" in its name, which refers to the 14 words of the international racist slogan "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

Although Patriot of Ukraine (PU) was disbanded in 2004,

it was re-established as an independent organisation in 2005: unashamedly neo-Nazi and unashamedly violent in attacking its political opponents (and not just its political opponents).

Committed to the completion of "the 'Ukrainian revolution" the creation of a "Third Ukrainian Empire" and basing itself on the "army-party principle", PU stood for the "creation of a powerful all-Ukrainian social-national movement, in which a new SNPU will hold a prominent place aided by storm detachments of Patriot of Ukraine."

Led by Andrei Biletsky, by 2010 PU had emerged as the most well-known and the most violent of the Ukrainian far right/fascist organisations. Its record included the murder of its opponents, violent confrontations with the police, protection rackets and ballot-rigging in local elections.

At the time of the Maidan protests, a number of PU leaders, including Biletsky himself and the PU's ideologist Oleg Odnorozhenko, were in prison, waiting to face trial on charges of attempted murder and various other crimes of violence.

Biletsky is also the leader of the Social-National Assembly of Ukraine (SNAU), founded in 2008 to replace the SNPU as the political wing of the PU.

The SNAU is fascist. It supports "national solidarity and authoritarian power", a strong military, a Ukrainian nuclear "deterrent" and racial laws to preserve ethnic purity. It opposes immigration because of the "threat" it poses to Ukraine's "racial and spiritual identity" and has carried out attacks on foreign workers.

According to its own publications, the SNAU espouses a nationalism which is racial, social, great-power, imperialist, anti-systemic (anti-democratic and anti-capitalist), self-sufficient, militant and uncompromising", and an ideology which "builds on maximalist attitudes and national and racial egoism."

Another organisation linked to PU is Brotherhood, founded in 1992 by Dmitry Oleksandrovich, after his expulsion from the UNA. The organisation espouses a form of religious fundamentalism: "We need a Christian Hezbollah: Brotherhood. We encourage all who believe in Jesus Christ to seize the streets of your cities, because tomorrow we will rule the world."

Despite collaborating with the Ukrainian neo-Nazis of PU in street violence, Oleksandrovich has also attended the annual pro-Putin "Seliger Summer Camp" in Russia and worked closely with the Russian-fascist International Eurasian Movement and the pro-Putin "Nashi".

After a warrant was issued for his arrest for organizing acts of violence in the Maidan protests, Oleksandrovich was reported to have fled Ukraine — to Russia.

Another organisation at the fascist end of the spectrum of the Ukrainian far right which also has links with the SNAU, albeit more informal than those of PU, is the Misanthropic Division, founded in October 2013:

"We are above all national-socialists and white racists. For us, national-socialism is not a theory or a fetish, and it is a lot more than a doctrine. It is our belief, our absolute unchallengeable truth. Either we will be victorious or we will die."

Such is the racism of the Misanthropic Division that it is hostile to Ukrainian Muslims fighting in the Ukrainian military against pro-Russian separatists, and equally hostile to Crimean Tatars oppressed in Russian-occupied Crimea:

"We cannot accept them (Ukrainian Muslims in the armed forces) as equal to us or as our colleagues. There is no place for them in our country, Ukraine. As for the Crimean Tartars, we have no positive feelings towards racially alien elements. Unlike the 'Banderists', what counts for us is first and foremost blood, not cultural identity."

Three other organisations of the Ukrainian far right, better known for their violence than their politics, of more recent origin are White Hammer, the Vikings and the Warriors of Narnia.

White Hammer is (or, after the arrest in March (2014) of most of its activists, was) a racist anti-immigration organisation. Its name derives from its members' use of sledgehammers to attack illegal casinos in and around Kiev (and confiscate the takings from their slot machines).

The Warriors of Narnia seems to have been created last year by a group of late-teenage males in Kiev. The Vikings were a creation of the late Oleksandr Muzychko ("I'll fight communists, Jews and Russians for as long as blood flows in my veins"), who was also a member of the UNA.

With the exception of Svoboda (see below), the above organisations were all small and politically marginal. Some of them — those more purely focused on street violence — were not concerned with electoral processes anyway. But even

The truth about the Maidan



Members of the right-wing Svoboda party marching during Maidan

those who did seek to build an electoral base were confined to the margins of Ukrainian politics.

The long-term historical goal of the Ukrainian far right and of Ukrainian nationalists in general — who, after the onset of Stalinist rule, were to be primarily found abroad rather than in Ukraine itself — was an independent Ukraine.

But this had been achieved in 1991. And it was the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, not something which the far right had helped bring about. The far right had thereby lost its principal historical goal, and any chance of taking the credit for securing that goal.

The far right also had nothing to contribute to the arguments about the future direction of the newly independent Ukraine.

It lacked political and organisational coherence, capable spokespersons, and ideological thinkers. Often still living in the days of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army of the 1940s, the far right looked as much to the past as to the future of the country.

Members of all far right groups also received little by way of political education, with the exception of lectures in "patriotic history".

In particular, those organisations more concerned with street violence rather than with electoral politics concentrated on providing their small memberships with physical and paramilitary training rather than a political education.

The party-political system which emerged in Ukraine after 1991 added to the marginalisation of the far right. Much more directly than in western Europe, Ukrainian political parties represented different factions of the ruling oligarchies. And no oligarchic faction looked to the far right as its political representative.

The Ukrainian Communist Party was able to survive, at least until recently, because of the vast resources it inherited from the ruling pre-independence Communist Party, because it had support from the oligarchic faction of bureaucrats-turned-capitalists, and because its retro-Soviet rhetoric had an audience in older sections of the electorate.

On the eve of the Maidan, therefore, the Ukrainian far right — ranging from those more inclined to conservative-nationalism through to self-proclaimed neo-Nazis — visibly existed, but was not a major force in Ukrainian politics.

The two organisations of the far right most closely, and most repetitively, associated with the Maidan are the Right Sector and Svoboda.

The Right Sector was formed on 24 November (2013), just a few days after the start of the Maidan protests. It was a merger, or at least a loose federation, of a number of the organisations already mentioned above.

Different accounts of the Right Sector give different versions of who joined it. The most consistent list of its members is: Trizub, SNAU, PU, UNA and White Hammer, along with some football ultras.

But in an interview in early February (2014), Yarosh said that the Right Sector was joined only by Trizub, UNA and

Sich. C14 is also known as Sich, but it remained far closer to Svoboda than to the Right Sector throughout the protests. There is also a far-right Cossack organisation based in Transcarpathia called Sich.

The Right Sector was an alliance born of the need for such groups to demarcate themselves from the rest of the protest.

The Maidan began as a demand for closer ties with the European Union. But the organisations in the Right Sector were all either sceptical or hostile towards the EU.

The first slogan raised by the Right Sector was: "Against the regime! Against Euro-integration!" According to one of the Trizub leaders: "From the very outset we did not go for euro-integration, but for completion of the national revolution."

And according to the eventual Right Sector press secretary Artem Skoropadsky:

"There are certain things about the EU that we do not accept, like same-sex marriages, abortion and assisted suicide. Right Sector members feel closer to Europe of the Polish kind than Europe of the Danish kind.

DEMARCATE

"In the early days of the Maidan representatives of LGBT groups, left-wingers, anarchists, liberals and radical liberals turned up. In order to demarcate ourselves from the small LGBT groups [Skoropadsky presumably means: and all the other groups mentioned], we came up with the name 'Right Sector'."

The spokesperson-cum-figurehead-cum-leader of the Right Sector was Dmitry Yarosh. His public statements reflected Trizub's politics. What he said could be at odds with the politics of other elements of the Right Sector. No member of PU or the SNAU, for example, would ever have said:

"I don't understand certain racist things they (Svoboda) share, I absolutely don't accept them. A Belorussian died for Ukraine, and an Armenian from Dnipro Petrovsk died for Ukraine. They are much greater comrades of mine than any, sorry, Communist cattle like Symonenko (Ukrainian CP leader) who play for Russia but are ethnic Ukrainians.

"Social nationalism is very complicated for me, because it is my belief that nationalism does not require anything extra. It is enough. Oleg (Tyagnybok, Svoboda leader) too has tried lately to go the way of traditional nationalism, thank God."

By contrast, the more outright neo-Nazis active in the Maidan denounced such politics. According to the Misanthropic Division (which stands close to the politics of PU and the SNAU, but refused to join the Right Sector):

"As we have repeatedly said, the Right Sector has nothing to do with the Misanthropic Division. The position taken by the political leadership of the Right Sector on certain questions seems strange to us and often openly treacherous.

"For example: Jewish collaborationism in the ranks of the Right Sector, the dubious links of the UNA with Chechen terrorists, and the existence of Chechens themselves in the ranks of the Right Sector.

"In our ranks are comrades of the SNAU, and also people of no party. We do not depend on any organisation but regard the SNAU as that political force in particular with which begins the rebirth of immemorial Rus'-Ukraine and all Europe."

Whereas the Right Sector was not created until after the start of the Maidan protests, Svoboda can date back its origins to 2004 (or even earlier, given its evolution out of the SNPU).

Svoboda dumped the words "Social-National" from its original name, ditched neo-Nazi emblems such as the wolfsangel, and disbanded its paramilitary wing. It toned down some of its politics, overhauled its organisational structures and stepped up campaigning at a local level around issues of "social justice" and the redistribution of oligarchic wealth.

But, at first, this rebranding resulted in no electoral breakthrough. Although it did enjoy some successes at a local level in individual constituencies, in the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary elections it picked up just 0.36% and 0.76% of the vote.

From around 2010 support for Svoboda began to increase dramatically, culminating in the party's success in the 2012 parliamentary elections, when it won 10.5% of the vote in the national party-list element of the elections, and 12 seats in individual first-past-the-post constituencies. Overall, it won 37 seats in the Rada.

Those elected in the first-past-the-post constituencies included Yuri Mikhalkishin, Irina Farion and Igor Miroshnichenko.

Mikhalkishin was, and is, a notorious anti-semit and Nazi-admirer. He founded the Joseph Goebbels Political Research Centre, has translated "classic" Nazi writings into Ukrainian, and has described the Holocaust as "a bright period" in European history. Farion and Miroshnichenko, were, and are, also well-known anti-semites.

The election of such individuals as Svoboda MPs reflected the limitations of Svoboda's evolution into a mainstream political party.

So too did Svoboda's links to the C14 racist and paramilitary organisation, the overt propagation of racism and homophobia by Svoboda leaders, and the involvement of Svoboda members in physical violence against political opponents, gays and human rights activists.

But such politics and activities do not explain (or explain only in small part) the reasons for Svoboda's electoral success in 2012.

In contrast to other parties, Svoboda was seen as a "real" opposition. Fatherland and Our Ukraine had had a poor record in power and were seen as half-hearted in their opposition to the Party of the Regions and Yanukovych. Svoboda, on the other hand, was an apparently fresh political force and outspoken in its opposition to the government and President.

Svoboda also played on the fears of voters who strongly self-identified as Ukrainian and felt that insufficient steps were being taken by the government to protect their identity. Yanukovych's increasingly pro-Russian orientation after 2010 was seen as a betrayal of Ukraine's national interests to the benefit of Russia.

And, consistent with a pattern in post-Soviet states of a ruling party boosting an opposition party in order to consolidate its own political base, in the run-up to the 2012 elections the pro-Yanukovych media portrayed Svoboda as a credible electoral force, thereby helping to create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Svoboda representatives appeared on television with a frequency out of all proportion to their actual electoral support at the time. This deliberately-engineered increase in Svoboda's profile then allowed Yanukovych and the Party of the Regions to mobilise their own voters on the basis of the threat posed by the rise of Svoboda.

Svoboda's attitude towards the EU was, at best, ambiguous.

According to one of its MPs, closer ties with the EU would mean "acceptance of a cosmopolitan ideology, dissolution into the modern liberal empire and submission to the gradual loss of national identity." Closer ties would "dissolve" Ukraine in "the ocean of transnational capital and migration flows."

At a certain stage in its history Svoboda had also built links with European EU-sceptical and EU-hostile parties: the French National Front, the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Bulgarian Ataka, the Italian Forza Nuova, and the Austrian Freedom Party.

In more recent times, these parties have switched their support to backing Russia and the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics". The Hungarian Jobbik party ended ties with Svoboda when Svoboda refused to support

The truth about the Maidan

its demands for Transcarpathian Rus' to be annexed into Hungary.

Despite its general hostility to the EU, Svoboda rallied to support the pro-euro-integration protest on the Maidan.

Even if Svoboda was not pro-EU, it was certainly anti-Russian and opposed to the Russian government's proposals for Eurasian economic integration: "A soap bubble for the revival of the Russian Empire in the new old Soviet Union." Compared with such a threat, EU-integration was a lesser evil.

Failure by Svoboda to participate in the Maidan would have alienated it from its electorate. Its voters were the most pro-European of any Ukrainian party. 71% of its voters supported Ukrainian integration into Europe, and 51% considered themselves European. The "Europhilia" of Svoboda voters was probably the flipside of their hostility to Russia.

Support for the Maidan protests was also seen by Svoboda's leaders as a way to stem the decline in support for the party which had set in after the 2012 elections. According to opinion polls, its support had declined to just over 5% by November 2013, and Tyagnybok's personal ratings had slumped from 10.5% in March to 3.6% in November.

Even before the Maidan protests, Svoboda had begun to go into decline after its successes of 2012. The Maidan was to accelerate that decline.

MAIDAN

The Maidan protests began on the evening of 21 November 2013, triggered by the government's announcement that it had dropped longstanding commitments to conclude an Association Agreement with the EU.

Using social media to publicise the protest, the initiators of the Maidan were the journalists Mustafa Nayem and Vitaliy Portnikova and the singer Ruslana Lyzhichko.

2,000 turned up to the Maidan — the central square in Kiev — on 21 November. By 24 November the protests had grown to over 100,000 people. Their main slogan was: Ukraine is Europe.

New lyrics were written for Beethoven's "Ode to Joy", the official anthem of the EU, and performed by the protestors:

"Joy, bright spark of divinity, is shining above the Maidan again; You millions, embrace each other, Ukraine is love; Let us sing towards Europe, that we have the strength and the will; Let us cast off the yoke of the past, the future is coming."

After a week of protests, and with Yanukovych standing firm in his refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement, the numbers attending the protests began to decline.

In the early hours of 30 November, the police and Berkut detachments attacked the protestors, using batons, tear gas and stun grenades, in an attempt to clear the Maidan. But the protestors refused to be driven off the square.

Instead, the size of the protests began to swell again, while protests spread to other Ukrainian cities.

On 1 December some 350,000 turned up for a protest rally on the Maidan, defying a government-imposed ban.

Some of the protestors broke through police lines and occupied the Kiev City Council offices and the fifth floor of the Trade Union Building, as well as unsuccessfully attempting to occupy the Presidential Administration.

In the following week the protest became increasingly well-organised. A "Self-Defence of the Maidan" was set up, tents were erected to create a permanent encampment, and barricades were erected around the edges of the square.

The slogans began to change as well, from euro-integration to ""We will not forgive" and "Revolution".

An opinion poll of protestors carried out on 7/8 December found that 70% were attending in response to police brutality, 53% to demonstrate support for signing the EU Agreement, and 50% because of a general desire to see life change in Ukraine.

82% of Maidan protestors wanted the release of protestors who had been arrested, 80% wanted the government to resign, 75% wanted Yanukovych to resign, 71% wanted the EU Association Agreement to be signed, and 58% wanted criminal charges against police officers who had attacked protestors.

Lviv, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk announced strikes in solidarity with the Maidan.

On 8 December up to 800,000 took part in the protests. On 10/11 December new clashes broke out between protestors and the police and Berkut after the government ordered another attempt to regain control of the Maidan.

Despite the freezing weather, rallies continued to attract as many as 200,000 protestors (14 December).



Protesters on the first night of the Maidan protests

On 17 December a Ukrainian-Russian economic Action Plan was signed. Protestors saw this as further evidence of the government's pro-Russian and anti-EU orientation.

The protests continued over Christmas and into the New Year. 10,000 protested on 29 December and the "Auto-Maidan" staged a 200-car cavalcade to Yanukovych's residence. 200,000 attended a rally on the Maidan on New Year's Eve.

Another round of clashes between protestors and the Berkut occurred on 10 January when the "Vasylkiv terrorists" were found guilty by a Kiev court and given six-year prison sentences. Sections of the Right Sector attempted to break through police lines to stage a picket of the court.

On 16 January the Rada passed the "laws of dictatorship", a package of repressive laws clearly intended for use against the Maidan protestors.

Occupying government buildings was to be punished by up to ten years in prison; wearing facemasks and helmets would result in a prison sentence; fines and prison sentences were to be imposed for the unauthorised erection of tents, stages, and amplifier equipment; and participation in a cavalcade of more than five cars would result in driving bans.

Around 200,000 demonstrated against the "laws of dictatorship" on 19 January. Protestors attempted to break through police lines to picket the Rada. This resulted in the most intense fighting since the start of the Maidan and, on 22 January, the first fatalities.

While more and more reports flooded in of police brutality, abductions, torture and attacks on Maidan medical facilities, Yanukovych awarded medals for bravery to police officers and members of the Berkut.

Opposition political leaders rejected a compromise offered by Yanukovych on 25 January, involving an amnesty for anyone who immediately vacated an occupied government building, reforms to the constitution, and allocation of the Prime Minister's post to an opposition leader.

On 28 January the "laws of dictatorship" were partially repealed. Further negotiations between opposition leaders and Yanukovych continued into February, with the latter offering further concessions while also preparing for further attempts to use force to end the protests.

When protestors again attempted to march on the Rada on 18 February, police and the Berkut responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. Dozens were killed, and over a thousand wounded.

Fighting continued over the next two days. On 20 February snipers were used against the protestors. By evening the death toll had reached 75.

By now the west of the country was under the control of the protestors and government members had begun to flee the country. More and more troops were also changing sides.

On 21 February Yanukovych signed a compromise agreement with opposition leaders, creating a new national unity government, providing for the reintroduction of the 2004 constitution, and setting down a timetable for early elections.

But after the killings of 18-20 February this was unacceptable to the protestors. The opposition leaders who announced the agreement were booed. Protestors demanded Yanukovych's resignation and arrest, otherwise they would march on his residence.

On 22 February Yanukovych left Kiev. A few days later he fled Ukraine to Russia.

The Far Right and the Maidan

Unlike in earlier waves of popular unrest in Ukraine, such as the Orange Revolution of 2004, elements of the Ukrainian far right, including neo-Nazis, played a visible and organised role in the Maidan protests.

On 24 November members of the Right Sector attacked

members of the Feminist Offensive, tearing placards out of their hands which condemned homophobia and demanded gender equality.

On 26 and 27 November they attacked socialists who attempted to intervene in the protest with demands for free education and cheap public transport, ripping up their placards and preventing them from entering the Maidan.

On 28 November about 30 right-wingers used tear gas in an attack on a women's rights group demanding "Ukrainian Women — European Wages" and "Europe — This Means Paid Holidays".

After the police/Berkut attack on 30 November Right Sector members trained protestors in street-fighting skills and played a prominent role in the fighting of 1 December.

It was members of Svoboda and C14 who seized control of the Kiev City Council offices the same day. They hung a portrait of Stepan Bandera in the entrance hall and displayed neo-Nazi symbols inside the building and at its entrance. At the same time, the Right Sector installed itself on the fifth floor of the Trade Union Building.

The far right was also to the fore in that day's attempt to seize the Presidential Administration, with some of the demonstrators wearing the SNAU and PU symbol of the wolfsangel on their clothes.

On 4 December a particularly brutal attack was carried out, probably by members of Svoboda and at the instigation of Svoboda MP Igor Miroshnichenko, on the Levin brothers, two organisers who worked for the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine.

On 8 December members of Svoboda and the Right Sector joined forces to bring down the monument to Lenin on Shevchenko Boulevard. Four days later, in a case of right-on-right violence, Svoboda activists attacked members of "Common Cause" as a punishment for supposedly having "deserted" the fighting of 10/11 December.

"Common Cause" had been founded in 2010 as an anti-corruption movement. It described itself as "a pro-democracy civil movement." But its emphasis on direct action led it play a prominent role in the street fighting and, in particular, occupation of buildings during the Maidan protests.

On 23 December Svoboda activist Svyatoslav Khanenko organised an attack on members of the "Volunteer-Doctors of the Maidan" (in what was probably a case of mistaken identity).

On 10 January the attempt to picket the court which had imposed prison sentences on the "Vasylkiv terrorists" — in fact, leading members of PU — was initiated by elements of the Right Sector. The attempted picket resulted in another series of clashes with the police and the Berkut.

THE RIGHT SECTOR

The Right Sector was also particularly prominent in the fighting of 19 January — in fact, much of the folklore of a fascist-led uprising focuses on its supposed role in these events — and subsequently issued a public statement taking the credit for the day's clashes.

On occasion, members of the Right Sector found themselves in a position of leading the Maidan protestors in chanting traditional Ukrainian-nationalist slogans, such as "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to Her Heroes!"

When mass rallies were staged on the Maidan at weekends, the forces of the far right were easily dwarfed by the turnouts. But during lulls in the three months of protests, especially on weekdays, the far right represented a much more significant presence.

So there were certainly examples of activities by the far right, which included overtly neo-Nazi elements, in the course of the Maidan protests. Even if other examples can be added, they fall well short of substantiating claims of a fascist-led coup.

The Right Sector and other elements of the far right outside of its ranks (C14, the Misanthropic Division, the most right-wing elements of Svoboda, and sections of "Common Cause") were never a numerically mass force in the Maidan protests.

By 19 January, when it played such a prominent role in that day's fighting, the Right Sector numbered no more than 300. In early February Yarosh told *Ukrainian Pravda* that he had 500 men under his command.

By way of comparison, up to 800,000 people demonstrated on the Kiev Maidan. Maidan protests took place in 50 towns and cities in Ukraine, and 20% of the country's adult population was involved in the protests (25% in Kiev, 30% in other towns, and 45% in the form of providing money, food and clothing).

The truth about the Maidan

The "Self Defence of the Maidan", formed on 1 December, numbered around 12,000 combatants and consisted of 39 "battalions". Svoboda and the Right Sector constituted just one battalion each: the second and the 23rd respectively. The former numbered around 150 members, and the latter around 300.

"Self Defence of the Maidan" had been initiated by Andrei Parubiy. Parubiy was a former member of the SNPU and the founder of PU in 1999. Since 2004, however, he had moved into mainstream right-wing politics. He had variously been a member of Svoboda, Our Ukraine and Fatherland.

Even small political organisations can sometimes win the political leadership of mass movements. But the far right did not do that in the Maidan.

With the exception of Svoboda, the post-1991 Ukrainian far right was more concerned with giving its members a "patriotic education" and paramilitary training than with providing them with the political education and training which would have enabled them to make an effective political intervention in the Maidan.

The Maidan began as a campaign in support of euro-integration. But the organisations grouped together in the Right Sector were anti-EU, while Svoboda was ambivalent. The far right line on Europe therefore isolated it from the bulk of the protesters.

The argument about a "EU-instigated fascist-coup" falls down on the fact that the supposed fascist stormtroopers of this EU-engineered coup were predominantly hostile to the EU.

NATIONALIST

True, the far right was able to lead the crowds in chanting the traditional nationalist slogan "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to Her Heroes!" But the protesters invested the slogan with a different meaning.

For the far right, the glorious heroes of the slogan were members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army of the 1940s. For the demonstrators, the glorious heroes were the Maidan protesters who refused to be cowed by the violence of the Berkut and paid for this with their lives (the "Heavenly Hundred").

A similar point applies to the fighting of 10 January, following the sentencing of the "Vasylkiv terrorists".

The "Vasylkiv terrorists" were fascists. But to most they seemed to be victims of the same authorities who were slandering and assaulting the Maidan protesters themselves.

The expression "Yido-Banderites" was used, but by Jewish protesters themselves, the apparent logic being that if the protesters in general were abused as "Banderites", then Jewish protesters should be abused as "Yids" as well.

One of the Maidan's Self Defence units was actually led by five former members of the Israeli Defence Force. According to its commander, Natan Khazin: "The copyright to that terms is unknown. But as soon as I heard it, I said that I'd rather be called a Zhido-Banderist than a Zhido-Muscovite."

The very visible profile enjoyed by the Right Sector in the Maidan protests was the result of the fact that when the forces of the state began to employ physical force in an attempt to crush the Maidan, from the end of November onwards, the forces in the Maidan with the knowledge, experience and training in how to organise violent resistance were those mainly grouped together in the Right Sector.

The mass of the protesters became radicalised — in terms of their attitude towards the use of violence — in response to the successive waves of state violence unleashed against them.

Violence became a legitimate form of political discourse. And those with the loudest voices were initially the forces in and around the Right Sector. They were the ones best equipped — both literally and metaphorically — to prevent the physical elimination of the Maidan.

Andrei Dzyndza, the founder of the Auto-Maidan, summed up such an attitude: "The real extremists are on the government side. Some (of the protesters) see the Right Sector as being too extreme, but we need them now. We need their kind of radicalism to support the revolution."

Bu this did not equate with political support for the Right Sector. According to the head of Kiev's Centre for Political Studies: "The Right Sector's popularity has been rising only due to public attention. People support it not because they share its far-right ideology but because they view it as the opposition's army."

The other reason for the Right Sector's visibility in media coverage of the Maidan was political. For Yanukovych, exaggerating the Right Sector's significance allowed him to attack the Maidan as fascist-led. For Putin, exaggerating the Right Sector's profile served as a warning to Russians: En-

gage in popular protest, and the consequence will be the rise of fascism.

The violence of the Right Sector was not just directed against the police and the Berkut. It was also directed against feminists, the left, and LGBT campaigners. But the left was able to intervene in the Maidan.

The left was certainly in a weaker position than the far right when the Maidan started.

It intervened in the Maidan later than the Right Sector. It lacked the experience to defend itself against Right Sector violence and to provide protesters with training in street-fighting. And whereas most of the far right coalesced into the Right Sector, there was no equivalent unified Left Sector.

Even so, the anarchist Direct Action was able to win the political leadership of the Students' Assembly, the Left Opposition was able to distribute its programme of transitional demands, the "Women's Battalion" campaigned against sexism, and other activists created the "Hospital Watch" (which prevented the abduction of injured protesters from hospitals).

The involvement of the far right in the Maidan, therefore, did not prevent leftists who chose to intervene in the Maidan from raising their politics.

As for the mainstream political leaders who supported the Maidan and who were supposedly being levered into power by fascist stormtroopers, the Right Sector's complaint was that these politicians gave them the cold shoulder. According to Yarosh:

"If you talk about the entire (parliamentary) opposition, for the most part we have no relations with them at all. They don't recognise our existence. It seems to me that this is a big mistake of the opposition, that they don't consider the forces of the Afghan veterans, Right Sector, or even Self Defence.

"They (members of the Right Sector) are the flower of the nation. These are people who right now are sacrificing their lives and their freedom for the sake of the fatherland. This is something else, but politicians close their eyes to it."

In fact, the parliamentarians of the Maidan did not simply "close their eyes" to the activities of the Right Sector. They criticised many of the Right Sector's activities.

Opposition leaders, including Udar leader Klitschko, Svoboda leader Tyagnybok and the future President Poroshenko, tried to prevent the occupations and attempted occupations of 1 December, urging activists to return to the main protest on the Maidan.

From the main platform of the Maidan the violence taking place a few streets away was denounced by the parliamentarians of the Rada. According to Tyagnybok, the violence was the work of "Titushki-provocateurs".

Vadim Titushko ran a sports club in Kiev. Its members joined in attacks on the Maidan protesters. "Titushki" became a slang term for any right-wing thug who actively backed up the activities of the police and the Berkut.

Leaflets distributed among demonstrators on the Maidan warned: "Do not succumb to the provocation of the criminal regime! Do not be a tool in the hands of the authorities! All their actions and words are directed at whipping up anger and hatred in people!"

When "Common Cause" seized the buildings of three different ministries in late March they were likewise denounced by opposition party leaders, who accused them of staging provocations which the authorities would use as a pretext to introduce martial law.

The opposition party leaders were typical parliamentarians: they were concerned to keep the protests "respectable".

The fighting of 19 January did the most to cement the Right Sector's reputation as "the" Maidan faction which was given to violent confrontation.

But the initiative for the march on the Rada, in protest at the "laws of dictatorship", came not from the Right Sector but from a non-aligned member of the "Auto-Maidan" in an appeal to protesters from the stage on the Maidan.

Klitschko and other political leaders argued against the idea of a march, but without success. The Right Sector itself fell in behind (as opposed to initiating) the proposal from the Auto-Maidan. According to Yarosh:

"The dictatorship laws that were passed on 16 January were the stimulus for these events. On 19 January Auto-Maidan activists drove up, and they wanted to go to the Rada and picket it. The Right Sector went up there in an organised fashion when hundreds of people were already there."

The weakness of the political influence of the Right Sector — as distinct from its visibility in the physical clashes during the three months of the Maidan — is shown by the fact that none of the demands raised by the Maidan reflected a chauvinist or nationalist agenda (and still less an anti-semitic, neo-Nazi or fascist one).

After the initial focus on the EU Association Agreement, the protesters' demands had nothing to do with the politics of the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 19030s and 1940s but everything to do with opposition to state violence and government misrule.

SVOBODA AND THE MAIDAN

The Maidan boosted the profile of the newly founded Right Sector. For Svoboda, on the other hand, the Maidan was little short of a disaster.

The activities of the C14 group, which was known to be linked to Svoboda, along with the activities of some members of Svoboda itself, drove a wedge between Svoboda and many of the protesters.

The open display of neo-Nazi insignia inside and outside the Kiev City Council offices, the openly neo-Nazi sympathies of the C14 leader Yevhen Karas, attacks on trade unionists, medical staff and journalists, and the staging of torchlight parades were condemned rather than welcomed by protesters.

While the actions of C14 and other Svoboda members isolated Svoboda from the Maidan protesters, their relative inactivity alienated them from other sections of the far right: Svoboda had been visible in the clashes of 10/11 December, but its "physical force" elements were largely absent from the clashes of 19-22 January and 18-20 February.

Svoboda members had attacked — physically — members of "Common Cause" for having deserted the fighting of 10/11 December. Members of the Right Sector heaped much greater scorn on Svoboda for Svoboda's own record of "desertion".

Svoboda's credibility was subsequently further undermined by the revelation that half of the informers recruited by the Security Service of Ukraine from Maidan protesters were members of Svoboda.

Tyagnybok himself managed to alienate everyone: C14 and their periphery of Svoboda members, (by condemning their actions); the Right Sector and those forces grouped around it (by condemning their actions); and the bulk of the protesters (who wanted a more radical challenge to Yanukovych than that advocated by Tyagnybok).

Despite owing his electoral breakthrough of 2012 to supposedly being the "real opposition" to Yanukovych and the Party of the Regions, in the Maidan protests Tyagnybok turned out to be cut from the same cloth of compromise as the other political leaders.

And for all his rhetoric during his "Arise, Ukraine!" campaign of 2013, in the midst of the increasingly radical protest on the Maidan Tyagnybok proved incapable of living up to his own rhetoric and providing any kind of leadership.

At the Lviv Maidan protest, the Svoboda MP Yuri Mikhalkishin was booed off the stage without even being allowed to speak.

The Maidan did not provide any boost to the poll ratings for Svoboda and Tyagnybok — the party and the politician who were supposedly leading the Maidan to its ultimate goal of a fascist-backed coup.

By January of 2014 less than 3% of Ukrainians thought Tyagnybok ought to be leader of the Maidan. Only 5.6% of voters said that they would vote for Svoboda in next parliamentary elections, and only 3.8% for Tyagnybok in the next presidential elections. In the event, such polling figures



Svoboda MP Yuri Mikhalkishin

The truth about the Maidan

turned out to be hopelessly overoptimistic.

In a scathing analysis of Svoboda's performance in the Maidan, one Ukrainian journalist wrote:

"But the greatest value of the revolution was that it had the effect of a mighty insecticide. It destroyed political parasites. And most instructively of all, this is what happened to Svoboda. If one could compile a hit parade of those who did the most harm to the revolution, then Svoboda would justifiably be at number one."

"Literally in the space of a few weeks the country was witness to the de facto fiasco of the party which had noisily threatened to lead the revolution but instead became not simply its brake but also its most flawed element."

REAL MAIDAN

Looking at the Maidan protest through the prism of the (supposed) role of the far right not only provides a distorted view of the role and influence of the Right Sector and Svoboda. It also obscures the reality of the Maidan protest itself.

One participant in a conference held in Kiev in April (2014) to look at the lessons of the Maidan for the left summed up the Maidan as:

"Not left-wing in terms of its composition but left-wing, libertarian in spirit. It was driven by protest against corruption and tyranny, against humiliation and oppression, by masses of people who felt their dignity had been offended by their rulers' lies, and who suddenly became aware of themselves as a single nation."

"It was the emerging protest against the personal enslavement and the aspiration to become free that were bringing more and more people into the square. And it was not only the anti-authoritarian motivation and nature of the Maidan that spoke of its left-wing essence but also its 'modus operandi'."

The Maidan was a mass protest that looked to its own strength to achieve change, not to the promises and speeches of established political parties and career politicians.

In December less than 5% of the protestors in Kiev had been mobilised by a political party, and less than 2% in January. Only 3.9% of Kiev protestors in December and 7.7% of protestors in January were members of a political party (which would suggest that even party members felt that they had not been mobilised by their own party).

30% of the protestors in Kiev were Russian-speakers, 19% had voted for Yanukovych in 2010, and between 15% and 19% had voted for the Party of the Regions in 2012.

Some left-wing opponents of the Maidan denounced it as "... a reactionary movement from the point of view of its class composition" One of many surveys of the protestors found that 40% were specialists with higher education, 9% were entrepreneurs, and only 7% were workers.

But in a particularly cruel article ("Friends of the Imaginary People") criticising Boris Kagarlitsky for denouncing the Maidan in similar terms, Ivan Ovsyannikov points out:

"The backbone of the Euromaidan was men between the ages of 35 and 45, 'angry young men', often unemployed. It would be a mistake to call Maidan a lower-class protest, just as it would be a mistake to call it a middle-class protest. It was a Maidan of all disaffected people who were able to get to Kiev."

Two thirds of the protestors killed on the Maidan were from villages and small towns in Central and Western Ukraine. Many of them were "sub-proletarians" — seasonal workers whose primary source of income came from working abroad in low-paid and precarious employment.

The ranks of the "Heavenly Hundred" also included a computer programmer, a journalist, an artist, several school teachers, university lecturers and students. But why, in 2014, should a computer programmer, teacher or lecturer be regarded as non-working-class, unlike, say, a machine-builder from Dnepropetrovsk?

In any case, machine-builders from Dnepropetrovsk also mobilized for the Maidan. As one contributor to the Kiev conference explained:

"The Maidan had the support of the unions affiliated to the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (CFTUU). We, machine-builders of Dnepropetrovsk, saw the Maidan first and foremost as a social protest. But later on the whole country was out, taking on the tyranny. The workers who had come with us quickly became politicised."

In January the CFTUU agreed to issue a call for "organizing a warning strike as a national movement of labour resistance in order to ensure and preserve the rights and freedoms of working people" and for the creation of "self-defence structures".



Makeshift memorial to those who died during Maidan

In the event, nothing came of its call for strike action — self-defence structures had already been established — and the CFTUU also shared the illusion that Ukraine's integration into the EU would solve the country's economic problems.

A distrust of "establishment" parties and politicians was a hallmark of the Maidan protest.

When the Maidan first began, protestors refused to allow any party banners to be displayed in the square. Opposition parties initially staged their own, separate, protest on the European Square. Only on 27 November were the opposition parties and politicians allowed to join the Maidan.

Time and time again the radicalism of the masses left behind the timidity of the politicians. Thousands — not just the Right Sector and C14 — took part in the Self Defence of the Maidan and the conflicts with the police and the Berkut.

When the Rada adopted the "laws of dictatorship" on 16 January, the opposition political leaders had no answer to the threat they posed to the very existence of the Maidan. It was Maidan activists themselves who decided to march on the Rada and, eventually, forced the government to back down.

Left-wing critics of the Maidan incorporated the clashes between the protestors and the police and the Berkut into their narrative of a conspiracy to bring down a "legitimate government", with fascists and neo-Nazis to the fore in the violence and the overall conspiracy.

But the physical resistance of the protestors to the repeated attacks they faced from the forces of the state was no more than a manifestation of how the protest became more radical and more militant over time.

What had begun as a peaceful protest in support of euro-integration evolved into a mass protest against state violence and government corruption which was not prepared to allow itself to be driven off the streets.

An appeal issued by academic experts on Ukraine and the Ukrainian far right ("Kiev's Euro-Maidan Is a Liberationist, Not an Extremist, Mass Action of Civic Disobedience") in January (2014) explained:

"In the face of what can only be called state-terror against Ukraine's population, an increasing number of both ordinary Ukrainians and high-brow Kiev intellectuals are concluding that, although surely preferable, non-violent resistance is impractical.

"Graphic pictures, juicy quotes, sweeping comparisons and dark historical references are in high demand. They are combined with a disproportionate consideration of one particularly visible yet politically minor segment within the confusing mosaic that is formed by the hundreds of thousands of protestors.

"Most protestors only turned violent in response to the increasing police ferocity and the radicalization of Yanukovych's regime."

Rather than being goaded into confrontation with Yanukovych by fascist stormtroopers, the masses radicalised themselves as they were confronted with the choice of fight or flee.

As the IDF veteran Natan Khazin put it, explaining his own reasons for involvement in the Maidan:

"The authorities were acting like the Kremlin, like Putin against demonstrators. In all the years of Ukrainian independence, I'd never seen so much force used against unarmed civilians. I decided that I should express my position as a citizen, and help the people that were fighting the regime...

"When people standing next to me on Institutskaia Street were shot before my eyes, and the body of one comrade after another hit by gunfire was dragged away, I lost my last ethnic-psychological distance. After seeing what I saw, I decided that I needed to act in a hard, tough way, without any com-

promise toward the enemy."

In what were to prove to be the closing days of the Maidan the leaders of the parliamentary opposition — supposedly attempting to carry out a coup to bring down the government — tried to foist a compromise onto the protestors which would have left Yanukovych in power.

Representatives of the EU — who, according to the pro-Putin "left" myth were planning the coup behind the scenes — had helped broker the deal which would have left Yanukovych in power at least for another year.

While the open coffins of the victims of the sniper fire of 20 February were carried across the Maidan and tens of thousands of protestors booed the politicians who had agreed to a compromise deal, a 26-year-old member of one of the Self Defence battalions mounted the stage:

"We are not in any organisation, we are the ordinary people of Ukraine who have come here to defend our rights. We are not from any of the sectors or from the Self Defence, we are simply the people of the militant battalion.

"And I want to say to you that we, the ordinary people, are saying to our politicians who are standing behind my back: No Yanukovych will be president for an entire year! He has until ten o'clock tomorrow to clear off!"

The speaker, Vladimir Parasyuk (not a member of any political party nor a member of the Right Sector, although he had once been a member of the CUN) also proposed that if Yanukovych did not vacate his office by the set time, then the Maidan protestors should march on government buildings and Yanukovych's residence.

The protestors backed Parasyuk. Nothing came of the compromise agreed between the parliamentarians and Yanukovych. Klitschko personally apologized to Parasyuk for having shook hands with Yanukovych. And within 24 hours Yanukovych had fled Kiev.

The masses on the Maidan succeeded in bringing down Yanukovych, against the wishes of the opposition political leaders.

But the Maidan did not succeed in stopping Yanukovych's politics of oligarchic privilege and corruption from being continued by his successors. As a manifesto issued by activists of the Self Defence of the Maidan put it:

"The new government of Ukraine, which came into power on the shoulders of the Maidan, pretends that it (the Maidan) does not exist.

"We were not fighting for Tymoshenko, Kolomoisky, Parubiy, Avakov and their like. We fought so that all the country's citizens would be its masters — each of us, not a few dozen 'representatives'.

"The Maidan does not believe that it has achieved the goal for which our brothers perished."

The Maidan ended the rule of one corrupt oligarchic politician. It was not able to end the whole system of rule by corrupt oligarchic politicians. That fact should not be allowed to detract from the militancy, the uncompromising determination, and the "libertarian spirit" of the hundreds of thousands — in fact: millions — who mobilized in support of it.

Even less so should the Maidan's limitations be abused as a licence to slander its participants as followers of "fascist formations like Svoboda and the Right Sector" and supporters of a "coup government" which was "engorged with fascists, neo-Nazis and simple pro-Western opportunists."

ELECTIONS

In the post-Maidan interim government Svoboda members were allocated four posts.

Within a month, one of them (defence) had been sacked. The remaining three were Minister for the Environment, Minister for Agriculture, and Deputy Prime Minister without Portfolio. Another member of Svoboda was Procurator General until June.

But holding government posts did nothing to stop the ongoing decline of Svoboda.

In the presidential elections held in May Tyagnybok scored just 1.16% of the vote. Svoboda did better in the Kiev city council elections held the same day (7.8%), but this was still well under half of its score in 2012.

In October's parliamentary elections Svoboda won 4.71% in the national party-list vote, just under the 5% threshold. Six of its members won in first-past-the-post constituencies. That was well short of the 37 seats the party had won in 2012.

Tyagnybok himself was not re-elected to the Rada. A coup which sees one of its supposed leaders lose his seat in parliament just eight months later is an unimpressive coup.

Such dismal results were unsurprising and had been predicted by opinion polls. In addition to its failures during the

The truth about the Maidan



Oleg Lyashko

Maidan protests, two factors which had explained Svoboda's successes in 2012 were no longer in play.

Svoboda could no longer present itself as the "real" opposition to the now departed Yanukovych. In fact, Svoboda had become part of the government. And with Yanukovych departed, Svoboda was no longer artificially boosted by the media in order to raise its profile.

The Right Sector did not fare much better after the Maidan.

The PU and the SNAU broke away to build links with other parties, especially Lyashko's Radical Party (see below).

White Hammer was denounced by the Right Sector as a racist and xenophobic organisation and expelled for "marginal (read: criminal) activities which blacken the name of the movement, and for non-observance of discipline." It seems to have collapsed after most of its activists were arrested in March.

This left the Right Sector with, at best, Trizub (Yarosh's own organisation) and UNA, although the latter's profile in the Right Sector now seems to be invisible.

In May's presidential elections Yarosh won just 0.7% of the vote. The total share of the vote won by Tyagnybok and Yarosh, 1.86%, was less than the 2.25% won by Vadim Rabinovich, President of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress.

Contrary to myth, there was no explosion of anti-semitism after the coup. In the first nine months of 2014 there were four anti-semitic hate crimes in Ukraine, the same number as in 2013 and 2012. During the same period there were 16 incidents of anti-semitic vandalism, graffiti and arson, compared with seven and nine in the two preceding years.

In October's parliamentary elections the Right Sector won 1.8% of the national party-list vote, although Yarosh himself — who continued to enjoy a high media profile after the Maidan — was elected on 30% of the vote in a first-past-the-post constituency and now sits in the Rada as a Right Sector MP.

Two other MPs who successfully stood as independents in first-past-the-post constituencies have also been classed as Right Sector members.

One of them, Borslav Bereza, is a Right Sector member. But he is reviled by the neo-Nazi (former) component of the Right Sector: He is Jewish, and the person who announced the expulsion of White Hammer from the Right Sector in March.

The other, Andrei Denysenko, appears not to be a Right Sector member. He publicly disassociated himself from the organisation in March and was backed in the constituency elections by the Petro Poroshenko Bloc.

Of the far right outside of Svoboda and the Right Sector, the Vikings seem to have collapsed after their leader's death, and nothing has been heard of the Warriors of Narnia since its members were caught breaking into a bank in March.

Although C14 has disappeared from view since the Maidan, it has not dissolved itself and many of its members now patrol the streets of Kiev in the Kiev-2 volunteer battalion.

The Misanthropic Division has "relocated" to the Donbas, where its "black battalions" are fighting "in the ranks of the pagan battalion Azov against the residues of modern society represented by khachi (racist term for natives of the Caucasus), chavs, communists, liberals, Asians and other Untermenschen."

Brotherhood has likewise "relocated" to Donbas, where it too is fighting in the ranks of the Azov battalion: "We fight for our freedom (against Russia). For me and our people it's a religious war too. They (Russians) call themselves Ortho-

dox, but they're not. Putin and the KGB (sic), all of Russian government, they aren't Christians."

The veteran CUN organisation, which was the historical initiator of Trizub but was not part of the Right Sector during the Maidan, contested October's parliamentary elections in its own right. It won just 0.05% of the vote. Only two other parties achieved a lower score.

Thus, support for the political forces which, so the conspiracy-theorists claimed, were the leading forces in the February coup has not only not increased since the Maidan. It has declined; and, in the case of Svoboda, declined dramatically.

Of course, the far right and outright fascism are still forces in Ukrainian politics.

The Maidan protests and later political and military developments (the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the fighting in the south-east of Ukraine) have seen the rise of Oleg Lyashko's Radical Party.

At the start of the Maidan the Radical Party was a right-wing populist party of little significance. Founded in 2010 as the Ukrainian Radical-Democratic Party, the party changed its name to the Radical Party in 2011 and elected Lyashko as its leader.

In the 2012 parliamentary elections it won just 1.1% of the national party-list vote, and just one of the 28 first-past-the-post constituency seats which it contested, won by Lyashko himself in the Chernihiv region.

Lyashko presents himself as a "man of the people". To prove it, he wears the traditional Ukrainian shirt and swears and sings Ukrainian folk songs at public meetings. He is pro-EU and pro-NATO, and promises to drive out the oligarchs

He frequently speaks holding a pitchfork — to be used to rid Ukraine of oligarchs, and also a means to appeal to rural conservative voters. His target audience is the traditionalist populist one of small farmers, small businessmen, and "the working man" oppressed by big capital.

LYASHKO

Lyashko's politics are not fascist. But they are those of an unashamed demagogic populist of the foulest variety. He is a kind of down-market thug version of Nigel Farage.

Although he was not prominent in the Maidan protests, Lyashko's demagogery won him some support. Lyashko followed up his success in the Maidan by posing as the champion of Ukraine against Russian aggression.

He promised to return Crimea to Ukraine. He posed in military uniforms. He claimed to be a regular visitor to the front-lines in the Donbas and to have created two volunteer battalions (Azov and Shakhtar) to fight there.

He has posted videos of captured separatists being interrogated and abused by him, just as he posted videos of alleged Yanukovych supporters being confronted and assaulted by him during the Maidan. Human rights organisations have condemned him for his vigilantism.

Attacking the oligarchs for their wealth and betrayal of the hardworking man, attacking the military commanders for their incompetence and betrayal of the brave frontline soldier, Lyashko has tapped into a popular mood of disillusion with the outcome of the Maidan.

In the 2014 presidential elections Lyashko came third, winning 8.3% of the vote. In the parliamentary elections five months later the Radical Party came fifth, winning 7.5% of the vote and 22 seats in the national party-list vote, but no seats in first-past-the-post constituencies.

At the same time as he was consolidating his electoral base Lyashko was also building links with the neo-Nazi elements of the Right Sector: PU and the SNAU.

One of Lyashko's first acts in the Rada after Yanukovych's flight was to successfully propose the release of 28 prisoners who had been sentenced under Yanukovych. These included PU founder Andrei Biletsky and PU ideologist Oleg Odnorozhenko as well as other leading PU and SNAU figures, all with a track record of neo-Nazi violence.

While Trizub members joined the Donbas and Dnepro volunteer battalions to fight in the south-east, members of PU and the SNAU joined the Azov battalion, which, if not created by Lyashko, has certainly been adopted by him. Azov's insignia, and the views of many of its members, are explicitly neo-Nazi.

Azov's first commander was Volodymyr Shpara, later succeeded by Andrei Biletsky. Both them are PU/SNAU members who owed their release from prison to Lyashko.

By the spring (2014) Lyashko had successfully levered PU and SNAU away from Yarosh. This had been facilitated by the hostility of PU/SNAU members to Yarosh's decision to expel White Hammer. According to the Odessa branch of PU:

"Together with the Jewish authorities, Dmitry Yarosh is carrying out a purge in the Right Sector. To begin with, they are cleansing the healthiest units such as White Hammer.

"Jews are openly swarming into the party (Right Sector), and then they will be another pack of Yids, like Svoboda. If Dmitry Yarosh is elected president, then we will end up with Russophobic rule which will be controlled by Yids and will fight for the rights of national minorities."

In fact, there had always been some ambivalence in the attitude of the PU/SNAU towards the Right Sector. During the Maidan many PU members had stationed themselves in the Kiev City Council offices, occupied by C14, rather than on the fifth floor of the Trade Union Building, occupied by the Right Sector.

So close is the Yarosh-PU-SNAU alliance that in the Kiev city council elections held in May PU/SNAU members stood for election on the Radical Party slate. Odnorozhenko, Mosiychuk and Krivoruchko — all of whom owed their release from prison to Lyashko — were elected. Shpara also stood on the same slate, but unsuccessfully.

In line with Lyashko's populism, the Radical Party's top party-list candidates in October's parliamentary elections were an eclectic mix of two career politicians (Lyashko and the party's vice-chair), the commander of a volunteer battalion, a singer, a Maidan activist, a political scientist, the son of the wartime leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and a swimmer.

But further down the list were Igor Mosiychuk at number nine (a former deputy commander of the Azov battalion as well as a member of the PU/SNAU), Dmytro Linko at number 18 (a member of Brotherhood and commander of its unit in the Azov battalion), and Krivoruchko at number 30.

The Radical Party won 22 party-list seats, so Mosiychuk and Linko must both have been elected to the Rada.

Another neo-Nazi elected to the Rada was the notorious Andrei Biletsky, the founder of PU with a history of neo-Nazi violence and ordinary criminality. He was elected in a first-past-the-post constituency in Kiev. He stood as an independent, but with the support of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's People's Front.

Vadym Troyan, also a member of PU/SNAU and another former deputy commander of the Azov battalion, likewise stood for election as an independent, but again with the backing of the People's Front. His candidature was unsuccessful.

According to Anton Shekhovtsov and Viacheslav Likachev, experts on the Ukrainian far right, the Rada elected in October will have 13 far right MPs, a third of the number of Svoboda MPs in the previous parliament. But of those 13 MPs three count as neo-Nazi, whereas in the previous parliament only one MP could have been classed as neo-Nazi (presumably: Mikhalkishin).

"SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE" NEO-NAZIS

The readiness of Lyashko to include self-proclaimed neo-Nazis on his party-list candidates flows out of his shameless and unprincipled populism.

The readiness of the People's Front to endorse self-proclaimed neo-Nazis as Rada candidates is part of a broader phenomenon.

In the context of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and its direct and indirect intervention in the south-east of Ukraine, Ukrainian voters place a premium on candidates seen as having a record of active opposition to Russian aggression.

According to a recent opinion poll, 46% of Ukrainians see war and peace and improving the country's defence capabilities as the biggest issue, compared with 25% who see corruption as the biggest issue, and just 20% who cite economic problems (in a country on the verge of bankruptcy).

Between October and November (2014) the proportion of Ukrainians who support a resumption of military hostilities in the south-east increased from 22% to 36%. Over the same period, support for signing a peace accord with the south-east declined from 53% to 43%.

Neo-Nazis (and not just neo-Nazis) who have been prominent in the conflict in south-east Ukraine against Russian-backed separatists have been able to key into such popular attitudes by presenting themselves as the defenders of Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Their standing is heightened still further by the contrast they can point to between their own voluntary contribution to the defence of Ukraine and the military incompetence of Ukrainian army commanders and their failure to provide troops with even basic necessities.

The Ukrainian politicians who have readily armed the neo-Nazis and the Ukrainian media who have helped build their

The truth about the Maidan



Russian troops in Crimea in March

reputation must know the politics — and criminal records — of these people. But they do not care.

Although the contribution of Azov to the defence of Ukraine has been little more than a succession of abductions, unlawful detentions, thefts, acts of extortion and extra-legal executions, Biletsky has been awarded the Order of Valour (third degree) and Troyan the Order of Bogdan Khmelnitsky by the Ukrainian military.

Although neo-Nazi members of Azov have declared their readiness to march on Kiev after the end of the war (to install “a strong dictator”) or even before then (“If Poroshenko stops operations, we will start a new revolution.”), the Interior Ministry continues to arm Azov while oligarchs (Taruta and Kolomoisky) continue to fund it.

Challenged about the neo-Nazi membership (PU/SNAU, Brotherhood, and Misanthropic Division) and neo-Nazi insignia (wolfsangel and black sun) of the Azov battalion, the response of Ukrainian politicians and bureaucrats has been denial:

“The views of some of them is their own affair as long as they do not break the law. And the symbol is not Nazi. Trust me — some of my family died in concentration camps, so I have a well-developed nose for Nazi shit.”

When Vadim Troyan was appointed chief of police of the Kiev region, his appointment was welcomed by an advisor to the Interior Minister:

“Vadim volunteered to join the Azov battalion in May. Together with Andrei Biletsky and his battalion, he freed Mariupol from terrorists, took part in the Ilovaisky operation, and, gun in hand, defended Mariupol from the offensive by Russian-fascist aggressors. He is an intelligent, decisive and moral person of firm principles.”

Not even the appointment of Yuri Mikhalkishin, the Svoboda MP who set up the Joseph Goebbels Political Research Centre, as head of the Ukrainian Secret Service’s Department for Propaganda and Analysis provoked any reaction from officials or politicians.

In late November Ukraine voted against a Russian motion at the UN condemning glorification of Nazism, in part on the basis that although Ukraine did condemn Nazism, the Russian government’s support for Russian neo-Nazis in the Crimea and the Donbas rendered the motion as exercise in hypocrisy.

But the failure of the Ukrainian authorities and political leaders to challenge Ukrainian neo-Nazis such as Biletsky, Mosiychuk, Mikhalkishin and Troyan exposes their condemnations of Nazism and fascism to the same charge of hypocrisy.

A similarly uncritical attitude to prominent neo-Nazis has been adopted in the otherwise critically-minded Ukrainian media.

Biletsky, Mosiychuk and Kryvoruchko have all been interviewed on Ukrainian television with no challenge, or even reference, to their neo-Nazi politics. Instead, they are presented and treated simply as commanders and members of the Azov battalion — and again scarcely without reference to the battalion’s politics.

Biletsky and Mosiychuk have both turned up to interviews wearing t-shirts bearing neo-Nazi insignia, but without interviewers exposing the political significance of such insignia. Nor have the contents of human rights reports condemning the actions of the Azov battalion been raised in interviews with its commanders.

Printed and electronic media, such as *Ukrainian Pravda*, *Left Bank*, and *The Insider*, have been equally politically uncritical of the neo-Nazi commanders of Azov, treating them instead as authoritative sources of information about the conflict in the south-east.

The July issue of *New Times* went a step further by including Biletsky in its list of “ten stories from the lives of people who are defending the independence of Ukraine in the Donbas.” The boost to the respectability of Biletsky and Mosiychuk provided by their election to the Rada will likely reinforce the reluctance of Ukrainian media to challenge them about their neo-Nazi politics.

Three neo-Nazis now sit in the Rada, according to Likachev and Shekhovtsov, two elected as list candidates of the Radical Party, and one elected as an independent but with the backing of the People’s Front.

Another ten members of the far right have also been elected to the Rada. There are also the right-populist MPs of the Radical Party, which has effectively formed a loose alliance with the PU/SNAU.

Lyashko’s party is now also part of the ruling coalition — consisting of 306 MPs, from all parties represented in the Rada apart from the Opposition Bloc, plus some of the 196 MPs elected in first-past-the-post constituencies.

The Radical Party will therefore be represented in the government. Lyashko — who has promised to drive the oligarchs out of Ukrainian politics — will find himself sitting alongside those same oligarchs.

While not being provided with a platform to promote their politics, neo-Nazis are interviewed and quoted in the Ukrainian media virtually without challenge to their politics. Although their politics have not become respectable, the individuals motivated by such politics have become accepted as legitimate public figures.

Some neo-Nazis (Troyan and Mikhalkishin) have also been appointed to public positions which most people would regard as incompatible with their political opinions.

And the neo-Nazis of the PU/SNAU, Brotherhood, and the Misanthropic Division who form the Azov battalion have all been armed by the Ukrainian authorities, as too have been the C14 members in the Kiev-2 battalion.

If or when the fighting is finished in the south-east, they will not be handing back their weapons. Such developments have taken place in the context of a threatening explosion of social unrest.

In the course of 2014 inflation has increased from 0.5% to 20%, and the hryvnia has fallen in value by nearly 60%. The oligarchic post-Maidan president and government have not lived up to the anti-oligarchic aspirations of the Maidan. And the simmering war and ongoing loss of life in the south-east adds to the discontent.

BOGUS “ANTI-FASCISM”

Anti-fascists in Ukraine need the support of socialists and anti-fascists abroad. What they do not need is the bogus “anti-fascism” of those who echo Putin’s propaganda.

Whatever its illusions in the EU, the Maidan was essentially a mass popular movement against social injustice. Fascists and the far right intervened in the Maidan. But their visibility was out of proportion to their real influence.

The Maidan was not “led by fascist formation like Svoboda and the Right Sector.” The “far right and neo-Nazis” did not provide the “shock troops” of the Maidan. The “neo-Nazi paramilitary Right Sector and fascist Svoboda party” were not “the vanguard of the anti-Yanukovich protests.”

Nor did the Maidan bring to power a “fascist junta” or a “junta relying on neo-Nazi terror” to maintain its grip on power. The post-Maidan government was not “engorged with fascists, neo-Nazis and simple pro-Western opportunists.”

Such manifestly ignorant claims about the Maidan serve a political purpose. Attaching the fascist label to the Maidan protests and the post-Maidan government has been used by Putin to justify Russian-imperialist aggression against Ukraine: The annexation of the Crimea “saved” the peninsula from the “Banderist regime” in Kiev, just as military support for the separatists “saves” the Donbas from the same regime.

The fascist label has also been used by Putin domestically in order to consolidate still further his authoritarian rule: Strong rule is needed to prevent the EU and NATO from staging a Maidan in Russia, which would only result in an upsurge of fascism and civil war of the kind now underway in Ukraine.

Using the fascist label for the Maidan and post-Maidan government further serves the purpose of giving a clean bill of health to the separatist leaders and forces in the Crimea and in the south-east of Ukraine. If the regime they are fighting against is “fascist”, then surely they must be anti-fascist.

No need, therefore, to look at the hundred and one ties

which bond the separatist leaders in the Donbas with Russian neo-Nazis and fascists, and with the forces of fascism and the far right throughout Europe — ties which exist because they bond together people of a shared reactionary ideology.

In fact, despite Russia’s military occupation and annexation of the Crimea in February-March, the Scottish SP magazine blithely declared in May: “Russia respects Ukraine’s independence.” The SSP presumably missed Putin’s speech the previous month, in which he criticized the borders of Ukraine created by the Bolsheviks and referred to eastern Ukraine by the old Tsarist label “Novorossiya”.

Those left-wingers who recycle Putin’s “Maidan-was-a-fascist-coup” propaganda end up as unpaid apologists and useful idiots for Russian imperialism. And in this country that role is fulfilled first and foremost by the “Solidarity with the Anti-Fascist Resistance in Ukraine” (SARU) campaign.

It criticises human rights abuses by the Ukrainian military forces in the south-east of Ukraine. But it is silent on the much greater human rights abuses committed by the separatist forces.

It highlights the activities of fascists in Kiev-governed Ukraine. But it is silent on the activities of fascists in the south-east of Ukraine, and on the role of fascists in the “first wave” of the separatists’ leadership.

It criticizes the crackdown on democratic rights in Kiev-governed Ukraine. But it is silent on the crackdown of the democratic rights of Crimean Tartars, and on the denial of human rights in the make-believe “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Lugansk.

It is silent on Russia’s annexation of the Crimea, silent on Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, and silent on Russia’s propaganda war against Ukraine.

The SARU website’s search engine produces no hits for Dugin, Prokhanov, Strelkov, Borodai, Gubarev, Zakharchenko, Plotnitsky, Crimean Tartars or the Holodomor, and (Russian-occupied) Crimea is mentioned only as the current residence of the leaders of the Borotba organisation.

It knows all about the events that led to the fire in the Odessa Trade Union Building in May, but it is clueless about who shot down a Boeing 747 in July: “The circumstances of the tragedy and the information that is available leaves more questions than answers.”

It recycles material from the Russian website Liva, a leading exponent of the “Maidan-was-a-fascist-coup” line: “Nazi stormtroopers for the EU and austerity: Without virulent neo-Nazis the coup in February and the current war in Ukraine couldn’t happen.”

It gives an uncritical platform to the Ukrainian Communist Party — without mentioning its predilection for erecting monuments to Stalin and the fact that its MPs in the Rada voted for the “laws of dictatorship” of 16 January.

It recycles material from the Ukrainian organisation Borotba — without mentioning that Borotba is boycotted by the rest of the Ukrainian left, has allied itself with Slavic Unity (whose politics are somewhere to the right of Trizub’s) and is a home for Stalin-nostalgics:

“There is great nostalgia (in Ukraine) for the Soviet Union. If only it could be re-shaped and the concept improved, most of the people in Ukraine would be happy to be part of it again.”

While its selective reporting strives to portray Kiev-governed Ukraine in terms of daily fascist terror, its occasional reports about Donetsk portray it as a veritable workers’ wonderland:

“Donetsk People’s Republic to nationalize Akhmetov’s enterprises. … Workers at ZEMZ want to establish collective ownership. … Workers have appealed to the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Donetsk People’s Republic. … The Donetsk People’s Republic has enacted laws guaranteeing miners (in the militia) employment after the victorious end of the war.”

And while it calls itself a campaign of solidarity with “the anti-fascist resistance”, it has no links to Ukrainian organisations which one would expect to find to the fore in opposing fascism: trade unions, women’s groups, LGBT groups, anti-fa initiatives, the non-Stalinist left and human rights organisations.

This is because SARU is a sham. It has nothing to do with opposing fascism, but everything to do with rationalizing and justifying the Russian-backed forces of reaction — including fascists — who have been unleashed on Ukraine.

The Maidan needs to be defended against the lies and calumnies of the Stalin-nostalgics, Putin-apologists and cheerleaders for Russian imperialism who masquerade as ‘anti-fascists’. No Pasaran!